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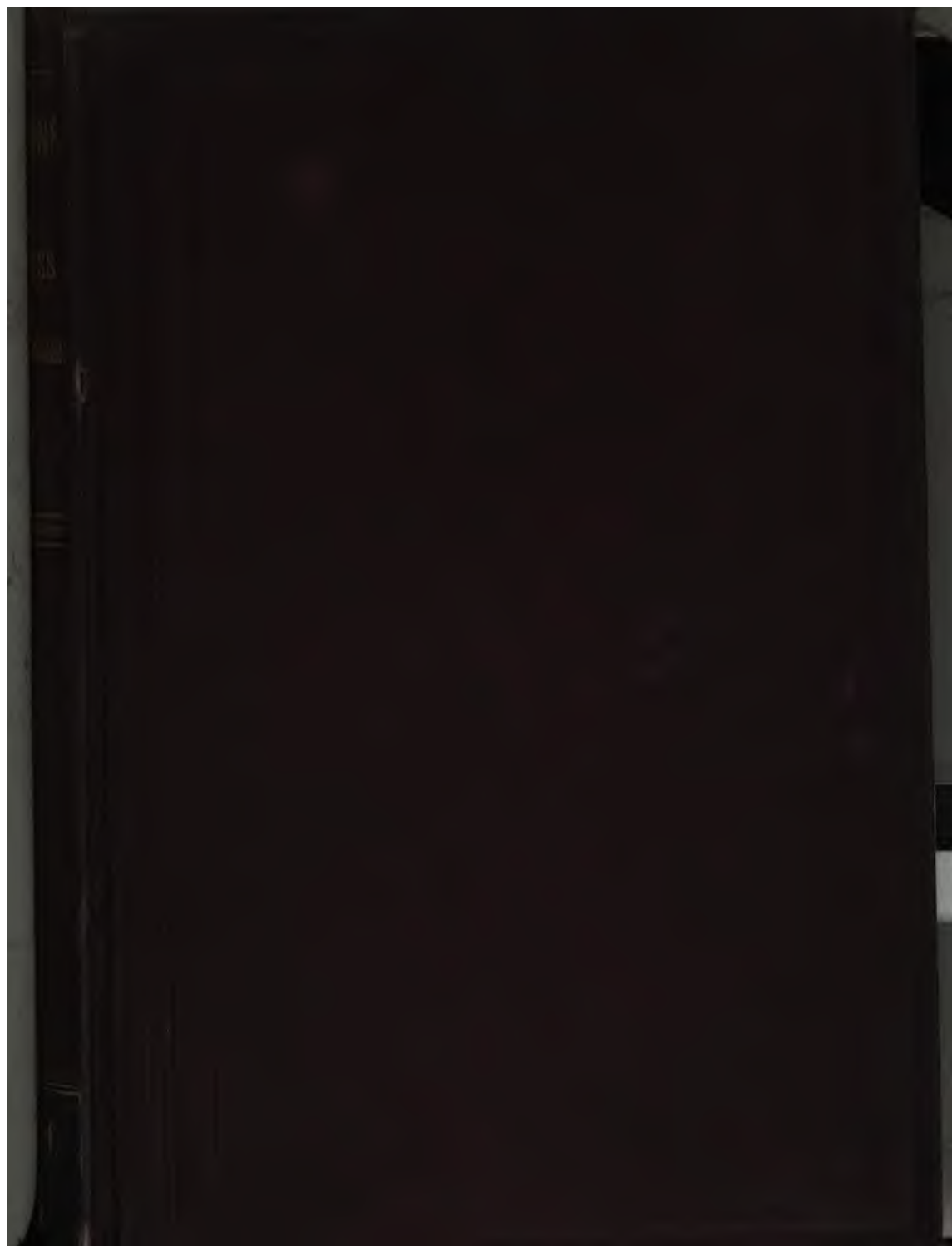
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ERNESTINE.

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ERNESTINE:

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHORESS OF

"THE VULTURE-MAIDEN," &c.

IN TWO VOLS.

VOL. II.



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ERNESTINE.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

"WHEN WOMEN HOLD THE REINS."

BREATHLESS with rage, the Countess Worronska descended the steps and went forth. Outside, a groom was conducting up and down her four champing horses, harnessed to one carriage. She beckoned to him, and he drove to the door, jumped down to assist his mistress to mount, and she at once caught reins and whip, and, glad to be able to discharge her wrath on some living beings, lashed the impatient horses. The groom had difficulty in swinging himself up into his place behind; for the carriage was already in rapid movement. Then away she sped, like Victory on her triumphal car flying to the battle-field to carry destruction to a host.

"Is it possible ~~that~~ this hectic, spiteful witch can wrest a man like Möllner from me?" she said to herself. "Shame on you, Feodorowna!" she added a moment after; "do not slander in your wrath! She is beautiful and noble, and a thousand times cleverer than you; but—I would like to strangle her with my two strong hands."

The passionate woman felt burning tears on her cheek. She struggled to obtain control over herself as her heaving breast strove for breath. She lashed savagely at the horses,

and the carriage swung hither and thither in its headlong course. She was grand in her fury, drawn along by the foaming beasts—symbols of her passions—urging them on and yet guiding them.

"But I will shew her what she is and what I am," she murmured. "I am not accustomed to be insulted by German heroines of virtue!" and she dealt the wheeler such a cut, that he plunged, and, dashing ahead frantically, drew the others along with him. In a few moments the village was traversed, and the peasants' house-dogs gave up pursuing and barking, and returned home with ruffled hair and discontented growls. The carriage rapidly descended the hill on which the village stood.

"My lady," said the groom, in German, "will you kindly look at that?" He pointed to a notice-board with a drag painted on it. But he was too late. The Countess could not disengage a hand to turn the crank that would clog the wheels; she needed both for holding in the horses, on whose heels the flying carriage was pressing.

"We shall be soon at the bottom," she answered, keeping the four horses' heads together. All at once, where the road made a bend, she saw a well-known figure on the path by the side. Her face became red as flame—there was Möllner! She saw not now that she was flying down hill, that the church stood by the roadside, and that Divine service was proceeding within; she did not reflect that on such an occasion, by order of the police, she was bound to go at a walk. She saw only Johannes—the man she would win at any price. She loosened the reins, and the horses rushed forward as if in a race for life. Just then Johannes turned his head, and made her a sign which she did not understand. He stood still. She thundered past the church, and some of the peasants, disturbed in their devotions by the unusual noise, ran out and looked indignantly after her. Johannes signed to her again, more energetically than before; and now only did she catch his meaning—that she should look ahead. To her horror she saw a knot of children playing in the middle of the road. She tried to turn her horses, to restrain them; but in vain. Horses and

carriage flying down the steep road could not be arrested in their career; and they dashed headlong upon the little cluster. Johannes jumped into the road. The children flew apart in dismay.

There was a scream. The Countess looked round, no child was visible. Whence came the cry? It came from under the wheels. At that instant Johannes reached the carriage, flung himself at the horses' heads, caught the bridles, and arrested them. Then he drew an unconscious little girl from under the carriage. With an indignant glance at the Countess, he took the child in his arms, and muttered, "I thought as much."

"Is it dead?" asked the Countess, pale with fear, holding in the horses with difficulty, whilst the groom put great stones under the wheels.

"Not dead," answered Möllner, "but severely injured."

"What an untoward accident," said the Countess, distractedly.

"It is not an accident," answered Johannes, reproachfully; "it is the natural result of your conduct, Madam."

Without another word, he seated himself on the bank, and began examining the child. "This is what comes of women holding the reins," he muttered, after a few moments, with scarce-contained anger.

"Möllner! do not reproach me," begged the Countess. But he did not look at her: he had eyes and thoughts only for the poor little victim lying on his knees.

"Whose child is this?" he asked of some of her playfellows.

"It's Kellers' Katie," said the children. "Our dear Katie!"

Some crowded round Johannes, others ran to the church to fetch their parents. Johannes, with tender hand, bound his handkerchief round the bleeding forehead of the child, and carefully drew the little coarse peasant bodice off, that he might examine the shoulder, which seemed to him broken.

The Countess Worronska observed this with envious eyes. She saw him only: not the forethought, tenderness, pity

with which he cared for the child; and the words, "Oh, that I were this child!" poured like glowing lava from her lips.

Johannes paid no attention to them.

"The arm is not to be saved," he said, sadly; "the best you can do, Countess, will be to drive on at once to town and send back in your carriage Professor Kern, or some one else, from the hospital."

"Möllner," said she, piteously, "I will not go till I know that you have forgiven me."

"I entreat you to make haste, Countess. Your first duty is towards this child. I am afraid you will meet with unpleasantness from the exasperated peasants, who are hurrying to the spot, so I entreat you drive on."

And, indeed, a humming, threatening swarm as of angry bees came pouring out of church, and in a few moments had surrounded the strangers.

"What is the matter?"

"Who has been hurt?"

"A child has been run over."

The news spread like wild-fire, and each father wished to look at the sufferer and assure himself that it was not his child. But when the first shock was over, dismay gave place to anger; for Katie—that most roguish, merry little Katie Keller—was the pet of the village; and it went to the heart of everyone to see the fresh, healthy flower lying before them helpless and broken.

Had this child ever hurt anyone? Who had not been pleased to hear the merry chirp of her laughter,—to see her beaming, innocent little face? And such a child as this was sacrificed to the headstrong violence of a haughty stranger. What had this mad woman been to their village for, disturbing the calm of a festival, and robbing a poor labourer of what he loved best? Oaths and curses answered these questions, which passed like lightning through heads already heated with wine, awaking a desire to revenge what had been done.

"Such a damned fury!" began one, "tearing by as if she were crazed."

"Where were your eyes?" asked another. "A child is not to be run over like a dog."

"Oh! it was only a peasant child—of no consequence to her exaltedness," sneered a third.

"Who ever before saw four horses harnessed abreast?" exclaimed several.

"Townsfolk are so full of pride that they don't care what they do."

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed a burly peasant, "don't talk so much; but take her in charge, and carry her off before the magistrates."

"Yes; before the burgomaster," growled the crowd.

Johannes was awkwardly situated. He was still sitting with the child in his lap, and no one offered to relieve him. He could not disturb it, and he could not allow the defenceless woman to be subjected to the insults of the mob. He tried to talk the people over to a soberer mind; but in vain. Only a few minutes ago they had seen or heard the Countess tearing past the church, and all their anger fell on her.

Johannes made a sign to the Countess to drive on. She was standing up in her carriage looking down contemptuously on the people. She answered him, "*Croyez-vous, que je craigne la canaille? Je ne quitterai pas cette place sans que vous veniez avec moi.*"

At that moment a shrill voice rose above the hubbub. "Jesus! Mary! my child, my poor child!" and a woman burst through the crowd, plucked the little one from Johannes, and covered it with tears and kisses.

A fine young man followed her, and gazed on Katie, wringing his hands and looking blank with dismay. "My God! what have we done that we should be punished so severely?" he murmured, and staggered so that a couple of men had to stay him up.

"Tear out that woman's eyes!" screamed the mother, transformed to a fury, as she hugged the injured child to her breast, as though to protect it against further injury. "Let her be packed off to prison—insolent, God-forsaken woman that she is!" She kissed her little one again, and bathed her broken arm in tears.

"Do not curse her," said the husband, gloomily; "it is a sin to do so on a festival." He pointed to Katie, and added, "This little life God will exact of her. Such a deed will not pass unpunished."

"May it fall on her speedily," sobbed the wife.

Just then the priest came out of the church, and approached with the gravity demanded by the occasion. The schoolmaster walked modestly behind.

"Look here, your reverence!" exclaimed the mother, "see what this woman has done to my child. Oh, schoolmaster look at your pet! What do you say to this?"

"How shocking!" cried Herr Leonhardt, as he bent over the darling of his heart, and scalding drops fell from his dim eyes. The women wailed in chorus.

"Give thanks to our dear Mother Mary," said the priest, considering it his duty to utter a word of consolation, and raising his hands piously. "Thank her for having blessed you above all others, in taking your child to herself as a beautiful angel, on this her Festival of the Assumption."

"Your reverence," said Johannes, "you are a little premature in your efforts at comforting these good souls. Thank God, the child is alive, and I will stake my reputation that she will live many a year yet!"

"You do not know what it is, after one has borne a child like this into the world, and worked for it night and day, and stinted oneself in food that it might eat, to see it lie thus, crushed and trampled on, like the fragments of a broken vessel, and that, too, just when the sorrow and care of its bringing-up is over, and one begins to rejoice in its beauty and love. May God punish that woman! May God punish her!" With these words the mother hastened away, carrying Katie, her trembling arm supported by her husband, for she could scarce bear her load, and yet would not relinquish it. The priest and the schoolmaster accompanied her.

"Heigh there!" called the Countess after the unhappy pair, "take this as a first instalment of amends. You shall have more afterwards." She held out a heavy, well-filled purse.

"Keep your money, we won't have it," said the father, in sullen wrath, and strode away without turning his eyes from the child.

The Countess looked down, blank and perplexed.

"He said true ; we don't want money, we want our rights !" roared the crowd, surrounding the carriage, so that Johannes could scarcely force his way through. When he came to the carriage, he hastily kicked away the stones that arrested the wheels, and called to the Countess Worronska, "For Heaven's sake drive on. Why do you expose yourself uselessly to insults ?"

"Don't let her go !" was the shout ; "take out the horses ! Fetch the burgomaster !"

"If one of us runs over a cat in the town, he is locked up. The swells shan't be let off easy, now," said others.

Some attempted to undo the traces, but Johannes, with iron resolution, stepped in their way, snatched the whip from the hands of the Countess, who would not take her eyes off him, gave the horses a couple of sharp cuts, and the noble beasts sprang forward snorting. The living wall which had formed in front of them parted, and the carriage flew away. There rose a yell of rage, and some raced after the Countess, but gave up the pursuit in a few moments, when the vehicle disappeared, leaving only the little groom, who had been forgotten, running after it, panting like a sporting dog.

Now all the wrath of the peasants fell on the head of Johannes, who stood composedly among them, with the whip in his hand. He had delivered the culprit out of their hands—assisted her in making her escape ; he was, therefore, a party to the crime.

"You belong to her. You must account to us !"

"I will gladly do so, my good people," said Johannes, calmly and good-humouredly, "but I must first attend to the poor child ; after that I will go with you before the burgomaster, or wherever you like." This simple answer pacified the excited peasants.

"He is all right, I know him," called a young fellow who had just come up. He was the peasant-lad with whom

he had struck up a conversation on the day of his first visit to Ernestine.

"Why, then, did you help that bad woman to escape?" asked some.

"Because I intend the matter to be taken up in a legitimate manner. I promise you full satisfaction, better than ill-treating a defenceless woman."

"That's the right sort of man," murmured the people.

"He will see to right being done: that's proper."

"Then please lead me to Keller's house," said Johannes.

"After that we will consider what is to be done."

The peasants nodded. "All right!"

"Come along, then; come."

They had not far to go before reaching the thatched cottage of the labourer Keller. A wooden stair outside led to the upper storey, for the stable was on the basement, and the room occupied by the family was above it. It consisted of a small chamber, containing the common bed, a tile oven, two wooden chairs, and a table. On the wall hung a crucifix, with a death's head and a holy-water stoup, and beneath it, in the bed, lay, still and patient, poor little Katie, buried under the feather bed, and looking with sunken eyes on those who stood round. The mother knelt, sobbing, at the side of the bed. Several women were trying to comfort her by assuring her that a broken limb mended very expeditiously, if a model of it were made in wax, and hung up in a church under an image of Our Lady.

The many wax members of all kinds hanging in a wreath round the image of the Madonna were proofs of the good results of such a pious practice. Frau Keller was urged not to delay offering such an oblation on this very day, the Feast of the Assumption, when it was sure to be of special efficacy.

Frau Keller shook her head. She was hardened by her grief, and did not believe at the moment in miraculous cures.

"Caspar," said she, "hung up first one leg, and then another that cost a gulden, before the Mother of God, and what good did they do him? He died in the hospital all the same."

At the end of the bed stood the priest. He shook his head when he heard this.

"Columbana ! Columbana !" he said, "do not be profane. Don't you know the cause of Caspar's death? Our Lady was not to blame for it. How could she help a man who did not trust in her, but flew to Fräulein Hartwich, and had his leg taken off by her advice? He did not die of his malady: he died because he made friends with a foe of Mary."

"Who knows," suggested one of the women, "but that Our Lady pulled him home by the leg."

"Indeed !" exclaimed Frau Keller, defiantly ; "then perhaps she wants to lug my Katie into heaven by the arm. No, no ! I will keep my child, even though she be a cripple from this day. I am strong, and can work for both. We shall manage somehow. Eh, Katie ! You don't want to go to heaven, do you—eh ? You would rather stop with father and mother, even though we should come to nothing but black bread ?"

"Yes, mammy ; I will stay with you," said the sweet little voice of the child, and she laid her head on her mother's shoulder. Frau Keller stroked the pale cheeks and sobbed.

"Mammy," said the child, with a strange expression in her eyes, "don't cry so. It does not hurt a bit."

A suppressed groan burst from the bosom of the poor woman, and she dropped her head on the side of the bed.

"My child, my child ! cry, fret, and toss about ; but do not be so patient, it breaks my heart. It looks as if you were already on your way to be a glorified angel !"

On the other side of the bed, which stood with the head to the wall, were the father and the schoolmaster, who had kept silent till now. The latter looked down on the child with hands folded, as though he were praying ; the father leaned back against the wall, with his hands over his face, the picture of despair. But now he raised his head, and said, with deep emotion, but with resignation, "Wife, control yourself ! we must take what is sent us. If we are called to surrender the child, it will be because the dear little thing is too good for us."

"Papa," begged Katie, "don't talk like that, or I shall cry, and that will make you cry the more."

Herr Leonhardt plucked the man by the coat, and whispered, "The child must be kept quiet; compose yourself, and get the women out of the room."

"I say the same," spoke Johannes, who had been standing some minutes in the doorway unobserved. "I must beg you, my good women, to depart; so many people in the room excite the child. Your kind intentions are most praiseworthy, but I must request you to show your sense of what is best for the child by leaving it alone."

The women, thus civilly addressed, went away readily. The gentleman was so open and amiable, it was impossible for them to refuse. The priest also departed; but, in obedience to a sign from Johannes, the schoolmaster remained.

There was plenty to be talked about in the road: how the child was faring, how she had managed to get under the wheels. And then it came out, in cross-examination of the children, that Katie had got out of the way in time, but seeing a neighbour's little lad in the middle of the road, had run back to save him. The boy had been rescued, but his little deliverer had been knocked down by the horses.

"She is too good to live!" said the men, compassionately.

"Ah!" exclaimed the women, "if you could have seen her lying so patiently in her bed, you would have said that she was already half in heaven."

In heaven she was, indeed, already, as far as every pure child's soul can be; for a bright, beautiful heaven is spread at no great height above the earth, so low down that only little children live and laugh and play in it. We grown-up folks stand above it; its beauties are hidden from us. It lies beneath us, like the clouds we see covering the valleys when we stand on a mountain-top.

"How are you now, Katie?" asked Johannes, going up to her.

"Quite well, thank you, Sir!" with her accustomed civility.

There was something inexpressibly touching in this

childish scarce-conscious self-restraint. The eyes of Johannes grew moist. He stooped and pressed a kiss on the little girl's lips.

"Another!" begged the child, and tenderly passed her uninjured arm round the strong neck of the kindly visitor.

"Our Katie," said the teacher, "is a brave little maid. Only think, Professor, she was lately the only one in the school who would give a kiss to Fräulein von Hartwich."

A light colour spread over the face of Johannes at the mention of this name. He seated himself on the side of the bed, and looked, full of affection, on the little face.

"Indeed! Did you do that, my cherub?" he whispered, and again pressed his mouth to the lips of the child. With his head bowed over the sweet little face, he fell into a pleasant dream. He saw Ernestine with the child in her arms; but gradually the child assumed *her* features; it was not this child that she bore. He loved this strange child now that it served as a link between him and Ernestine. Oh, what love would his be for a little being that was hers!—that was also his! There was perfect stillness in the room. The parents looked on the group without speaking. Herr Leonhardt did not stir. He alone understood what was passing in the mind of Johannes. The little bosom heaved and fell more regularly and peacefully. Möllner passed his hand under the little head, to support it in an easier position, and Katie sank into sleep under the gentle eyes of her protector. Johannes looked at the clock. The surgeons whom the Countess would send could not be there for some time. He determined, however, to wait for them.

"Husband," whispered Frau Keller to her helpmate, "I have got an odd idea in my head. When the schoolmaster said just now that Katie had kissed Fräulein Hartwich, I remembered that when she came back from school on that occasion, she told me the children had prophesied that mischief would come of it, for Fräulein Hartwich had bewitched her. Hush! not a word lest the schoolmaster hears; it would make him angry. But I can't take my thoughts off it. It's an odd coincidence, is it not?"

The man looked thoughtfully at his wife, and scratched

his head. After a pause, he muttered, "One must not make too much of such matters. But, for all that, you are right ; it is a very strange coincidence. Deuce take that Hartwich woman ! What led her to kiss my child ? There is always some ill-luck attending her !"

"Go and talk it over with the priest, and see what he thinks of the matter. But don't take the schoolmaster into your confidence. Off with you, and pretend you want to drink a glass. Katie is asleep now."

The man slipped out as lightly as he could with his hob-nailed shoes, to take counsel with the priest on this suspicious circumstance.

CHAPTER II.

"VOX POPULI, VOX DEI."

WHEN Keller reached the public-house, he went in to moisten his dry throat, and found the Catholic priest in the guest-room surrounded by the worthies of the village and its neighbourhood. The Protestant pastor was there also, for such an uncommon event demanded consideration in common. The host was hard at work supplying glasses and bottles, and in his heart thanked the stars for the untoward event, for it had caused a full stream to flow from his casks.

"Oh! There is the poor father! How goes the child? What is the injury done?" rang from all sides as Keller entered.

"It is a bad affair," said he, "the child will be a cripple."

Then rose a buzz of sympathy.

Keller turned to the priest and asked him to allow him a few words in private. The pastor readily lent him his ear.

"Your reverence," said the peasant, "Columbana thinks that Fräulein Hartwich is the cause of the accident."

The priest clasped his hands, "What? What makes her think so?"

Keller related the circumstances.

The clergyman shook his head, and turning to the Protestant minister, said aloud, "My dear colleague, is it not as if the finger of God were pointing out to us our duty to keep as clear as possible of that unnatural woman who has come among us like a poisonous serpent?"

Then he related what Keller had told him, in a voice that all could hear.

The Protestant minister, who was always hand and glove with the Catholic pastor when a common foe had to be attacked, also took up the matter seriously. "It would of course be superstitious to assert that Fräulein Hartwich had bewitched the child," he said with solemnity, "but it is written in the divine oracles, 'cursed are the ungodly,' and the curse that rests on those who renounce God reaches those with whom they have relations."

The peasants were much agitated,—the air was rendered stifling with the fumes of wine they had drunk, and which were exhaled from their stentorian lungs.

"So far is clear," said the evangelical pastor, with strong emphasis; "All the mischief comes indirectly if not directly from that Hartwich woman."

"Yes, yes," was the echo from every corner.

"To whom has she brought happiness? To whom has she given good advice?" he continued.

"To none, to none."

"Has she not sought to scatter among you the seeds of her blasphemous tenets? Has she not endeavoured, when allowed to go near your sick beds, like the serpent in Eden, to hiss doubt into your ears, instead of breathing into them heavenly consolations?"

"Yes, yes. And she spoke contemptuously of the clergy and their office."

Both pastors looked at one another with grief on their faces.

"She has risen in rebellion against the Church," cried the priest. "When I went to the castle to administer extreme unction to Cunegund who was sick, she turned me out, saying that the maid was not dying, and that the ceremony would excite her and do her harm. She will not endure the sight of the Crucified in her house. She is an outcast from God and His Church. A few hundreds of years ago such persons were burnt, and with good reason. We all suffer the weight of the curse that lies on her, and yet must bear it with patience! The devil has clothed himself in the mantle of humanity so that all his offspring may find shelter under its folds, and we are not allowed to protect ourselves."

"She is a poisonous ulcer in our flesh," added the Protestant minister. "Well was it written, 'If thine eye offend thee pluck it out and cast it from thee,' but we are forbidden, forsooth, by nineteenth century enlightenment to remove the disease which is festering and poisoning the whole body."

"Why not remove it? Who is to prevent us?" clamoured the furious peasants.

"The Government!" muttered the pastor.

"If Government protects blasphemers and witches—why blast it——!"

"Hush, hush!" interrupted the reverend gentleman, "be on your guard, friends; the police have long ears, and may hear. You must not speak or attempt anything against the Government, but it is your duty to shew this wretched woman that we do not want her here to disturb the peace of our happy village, and that this is not a place where she can practise her godless deeds with impunity."

"Yes, yes, so we shall! Never fear!"

"Then do you really think she did the harm to our poor little Katie?" asked Keller, full of horror.

"We won't say that exactly," answered the evangelical pastor, "but we cannot deny that the hand of Providence has been here, warning us whom to avoid. So far is certain, that the stranger who ran over the child was returning from a visit to Fräulein Hartwich, and that if this latter were not living here the accident would never have occurred. In that case that fury would not have invaded our village."

"This Hartwich witch is to blame for it in every way," roared the tipsy throng.

"Quite so; you are in the right," said the herald of evangelical charity, "and I affirm with my excellent comrade that she is at the bottom of all the mischief."

"Yes, all the mischief comes from Hartwich," roared the chorus.

"Good God!" cried one, pointing out of the window, "Look yonder! There she is."

All peered out.

"The Hartwich as large as life!"

"She dares to show her face outside the castle walls!"

"She wants to feast her eyes on the mischief she has wrought!"

"Jesus, Mary!" cried Keller, "she is going to my house!" and with a rush he reached the door.

The whole drunken swarm poured out after him into the road, like fermenting wine from a cask when the spigot is blown out.

The clergymen remained behind and looked at each other.

"What is to be done?" asked one of them, "had we not better follow, to guard against mischief?"

"Let them alone, dear colleague," said the other, "it would not be seemly for us to be mixed up with the row. That woman does not deserve our protection, and the righteous indignation of the people will find a vent in words only. It won't hurt her to hear what they think of her conduct. The voice of the people is the voice of God."

"You are right there," said the first; "the popular conscience must assert its right to speak without let or hindrance. She would not listen to *us*, so let her hear the truth from the throats of the peasants. It is quite possible that a sermon of this sort will produce livelier effects than one by educated men like ourselves."

"So let us hope," said the Catholic priest, seating himself at a table with the Protestant minister, and pouring out a glass of red wine for him from the bottle just set before them by the host.

* * * * *

"What is that?" asked Johannes softly, as he heard with astonishment the hum of approaching voices and tramp of feet. His hand was still under Katie's head, and he did not want to withdraw it lest he should wake her.

The schoolmaster stole on tip-toe to the window and looked forth. "I can't make it out," said he, "I see a rabble coming down the street, but I cannot understand what it is about."

"The people are still excited over what has taken place," suggested Johannes.

The noise approached. A few words of abuse were audible, then sounds as of stones falling on the pavement. Shrill female voices were heard screaming, "You shan't come in here!" "Away with you!" "Get along with you!" And boys were heard shouting and whistling.

"Good God!" cried the schoolmaster, "they are pursuing a lady—yes! Professor, look, look!—She wants to take refuge in the houses, and the women won't let her in; they slam the doors in her face."

"Brutes!" exclaimed Johannes, mad with indignation, for he had cast a glance through the window, and seen who was being hunted down.

"Jesus, Mary! They are throwing apples and stones at her!" screamed Frau Keller.

Johannes was already out of the room when the schoolmaster turned and said, "It is Fräulein von Hartwich."

Johannes had already reached the entrance when Keller burst in pale with agitation, and slammed and locked the door.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Johannes, "are you going to imprison me?"

"Please, Sir!" begged Keller, planting himself in the way, "don't open: that Hartwich witch wants to come in."

"Well, let her in, quick! why do you delay?"

"No—for God's sake not!" exclaimed Keller.

"Are you mad!" cried Johannes, "do you shut the door against one who is being ill-treated and needs protection? Open at once, or I shall use force."

"Sir, Sir! I have a right to do what I will with my own house, and though I am only a poor labourer, I will maintain my right!" cried Keller, blocking the way with determination; "this door-step is blessed with honourable toil, and no foot accursed of God shall pass over it."

The raging torrent seemed now to be tossing about the house. A stone crashing against the door showed that the object of pursuit had sought refuge there.

Johannes lost all mastery over himself; his usually calm blood boiled in his veins, and his heart seemed nigh on bursting. With the strength of ten he seized the peasant

by his broad shoulders, flung him aside, so that he fell against the schoolmaster who was hurrying up; then he tore the door open; and Ernestine sank almost fainting at his feet. He caught her up, with a look of unutterable tenderness, threw one arm protectingly round her, holding her to his side, and cried with a tone so full of resolution as to leave no doubt of his intention to do what he threatened—"I will knock down the first of you who dares approach this lady."

A muffled growl rose. "Let him try it on!" he heard, and saw clenched fists raised against him.

"Yes, I will try it on," threatened Johannes; "but let me tell you that he who feels the weight of my arm may get his death-blow." The resolution with which he spoke made such an impression, that no one ventured to attack him. But abuse and stones flew about. Johannes drew Ernestine's head closer to him. "Cowards!" he cried, "hitting from a distance, and afraid to approach." He turned to Keller. "Will you not let this lady take refuge under your roof? You see that she can scarcely stand."

Keller looked at his wife who had run up.

"Don't let her in," entreated she; "for heaven's sake keep her out. Has she not already brought enough evil on us?"

Keller's answer to Johannes was a shrug of the shoulders: "You see, my wife won't allow it."

Johannes stamped with fury.

"Are you a man?"

"Yes, Sir," said Keller, sullenly, sticking his hands in his pockets.

"Aye, and better than those who back up such a woman as this!" shouted the mob, and a great stone flew by the ear of Johannes.

"If I were as idiotic as you," cried Johannes, "I would throw back at you the stones that fall here, and with better aim than yours. But I do not choose to fight drunken sots, and quarrel with those who have no sense in their heads. I ask nothing of you but that you will make room for this lady and me, that I may lead her home."

The crowd stood packed together, and muttered unin-

telligible words, from which Johannes was only able to gather that they thought Ernestine had not been given enough chastisement, and that they had no intention of letting her off so easily.

"I will pay you what you ask if you will take this lady in till the mob is quieted," said Johannes to Keller.

"Leave me alone, Sir ; Neither love nor money will persuade me to let her cross my threshold."

"Mother, let her in!" cried a little voice suddenly, and the effect on the crowd was indescribable. Katie had stolen unobserved out of bed, and come up in anxiety. She threw her little arm round Ernestine's knees, and, looking up in her face, said, "They shan't hurt you. I love you so!"

"Jesus, Mary!" screamed Frau Keller, "my child, my child!" She snatched it from Ernestine and, followed by her husband, carried it back to bed. "Will you kill yourself?" her father said, despairingly.

"No, the young lady! the young lady!" cried the child, and the people without could hear her crying.

Now a commotion arose of a character becoming momentarily more serious. "You have heard : you have seen with your own eyes ! The sick child was forced to crawl to her assistance from her bed ! Do you doubt now that it was bewitched? She must pack out of the village to-day,—to-day—or we will drive her out——"

"Good people ! good people ! what are you doing ?" said a gentle voice behind Johannes.

"Oho ! the schoolmaster !" rose in a general shout. "Let him come on, we have had enough of him long ago. Come on, and we'll serve him out for making friends with the witch." Again the flood poured up the lower steps of the stair on the top of which stood Johannes.

"Back !" thundered Johannes, and he gave Ernestine to the teacher. "Back ! you see I have both arms at liberty now."

The foremost involuntarily recoiled before the threatening form.

"Blinded fools !" shouted Johannes, excited to the last degree, "Is nothing sacred to you in your rage,—neither a

helpless girl nor the grey head of your schoolmaster? What harm has this poor martyr done you, who has wasted his life in trying to make you rational men?"

"He is in league with Hartwich. It was his doing that she kissed the child. Let us burn down his house over his head."

"Yes, yes?" roared the mob, "Smoke them out of their holes, him and her. The scoffers! The despisers of religion! We will teach them to believe in God!"

"Indeed!" thundered Johannes. "You will show your piety by incendiarism! Woe to you if you lay hand on either house. Do you know the punishment for incendiarism? The tread-mill. And I give you my word I will see to your getting your deserts."

He was answered by a howl of rage.

"Professor," begged Leonhardt, "it is of no use exasperating these people, and it is hopeless to convince them. Good people!" he called, and his voice trembled rather from sorrow than from fear. "Good people, I have lived among you, grown old among you; I know you better than you do yourselves. You are far too sensible to incur the inevitable punishment which the law would deal out to transgressors, and you are far too good-hearted to commit an offence against those who have never done you any harm. You do not yourselves believe that I despise religion. Have I not brought up your children in the fear of God? Have I not stood by you in the hour of need? The little house you talk of burning down has sheltered many of you, has been a hallowed spot to your children, and you *could* not lay your hands on it. Go to the churchyard, and see if there be a grave there of those you love which is not adorned with flowers from my garden, and would you bury that garden under the ashes of my roof? No, do not pretend to be worse men than you really are." He let Ernestine sink on the steps, and stepped before her. "You know that your old schoolmaster is pitiful towards every creature of God that suffers, and do you condemn me because I pity this unfortunate young lady whom you all hate, and no one feels compassion for? You regard me

as godless because I trust that this strayed yet noble soul will one day find its God, and because I help it to seek Him? Well, take up your stones—see, I remove my cap and offer you my white head. Whose hand will aim at it?”

The old man stood with bare head before them, holding his cap between his folded hands. The evening breeze played with his silver locks, and the stones fell from the hands of the rabble.

Then some one gently drew down his arm, and a pair of lips secretly pressed a kiss on the withered hand. It was Ernestine. Johannes saw her action, and his eyes filled. She could feel,—she could be grateful! He exchanged a glad glance with the old man, to whom this token had been given.

“He’s a feeble old man,” said the people to one another. “Let him pass, he means no harm. Let him go.”

“I will fetch the clergy,” said Leonhardt in a low voice to Johannes, and he descended the stairs. He walked composedly through the crowd which opened before him, but closed at once behind him again.

“Come,” said Johannes, as he raised Ernestine, “let us attempt to put an end to this painful scene.” He carried rather than led her down the steps. “Make way!” he called. Those nearest stepped back. At that moment Frau Keller was seen on the threshold with the holy water stoup in her hand, that hung over the bed, sprinkling the spot where Ernestine had stood. Her pious act met with vociferous applause. Ernestine, who had turned, grew paler, tears trembled in her eyes. Giddiness came over her, and Johannes was obliged to support her, or she would have fallen.

“Be of good courage,” said Johannes, in a whisper to her; “How can this tomfoolery disturb you?”

“Look!” screamed some women and men together, “she can’t stand the holy water! She was not touched by the stones, but a couple of drops of water cast her down.” And the tumult broke out again.

“Is it possible,” exclaimed Johannes, without thought of

the consequences, "Is it possible that in the nineteenth century, in the heart of civilization, such folly can survive? Do you really suppose if this lady were a witch, and in league with the devil, that she would have subjected herself to such treatment without revenging herself on you? Do you think that your impertinences and stone-throwing are a pleasure to her? The distress you have caused her, and which she has borne patiently, is a proof to you that she has no supernatural powers at her disposal: a proof too, that she has not even the bold and defiant spirit of that other lady, who justly excited your indignation. But I can assure you that my strength is unbroken, that my patience is exhausted, and that my powers, if not supernatural, are at all events sufficient to obtain chastisement for this outrage, and to call up a legion of demons in the shape of police to take you into custody. Consequently, I advise you to make way for us, and keep your hands off us; every moment of opposition increases the gravity of the accusation I shall bring against you before the magistrates."

He passed his left arm round Ernestine, and with the other swept a space for his passage, and the crowd muttering, but frightened by his last threat, fell back.

At that moment the clergymen came up, followed by the schoolmaster, with alarm on their faces.

"You have arrived too late, gentlemen," said Johannes, with unusual severity; "too late to ward off from your flocks the brand of infamy which has been stamped on them." His penetrating glance rested on their dismayed faces. "I supposed it impossible that such an occurrence could have taken place in our time. You, gentlemen, have convinced me of the contrary, and have enriched the history of our modern civilization with a chapter full of melancholy interest. I am quite satisfied as to the source whence this flood of bigotry and insolence has flowed, and which has been poured by this misled populace over the head of Fräulein von Hartwich. And now, Sirs, I make you responsible for the maintenance of order, and for the safety of this lady." He drew Ernestine's arm closer within his own, and walked away without waiting for an answer from the parsons,

who stood speechless with fear and perplexity, and stared at him with involuntary respect.

The handsome couple reached the castle in silence, and entered the garden. Ernestine unconsciously allowed herself to be led along the shady paths. Involuntarily Johannes directed his course towards the mound on which he had seen her for the second time. He had already resolved not to leave Ernestine alone at Hochstetten; he knew she was only safe under his protection, and he determined to take her that evening to his mother. But would he be able to persuade her to this? This was the question he asked himself and which held him in tension of anxiety.

Ernestine was incapable of giving utterance to her feelings. She did not dare to raise her eyes to her protector. Shame, burning shame, covered her soul, at the thought how instinctively she had fallen into the inferior, dependent position of a woman, and had recognised in him the special, superior prerogatives of a man. She admired him! What feelings were hers? There was the same humiliation she had undergone under the oak years ago, this self-same day, after having been pursued with mockery and insult then as to-day. There was the same feeling as when she met the lad, and he gave her that prophetic book. But when would the prophecy come true? When would she cease to be ill-used, mocked, despised? When would her wings spread on the calm clear tide of sunny bliss? the wings of the lonely, hunted, weary swan? Suddenly, overcome by grief she clasped her hands over her face, and burst into tears. She sank on the mound, and sobbed as a child. Johannes stood silent before her. The same thoughts, the same recollections filled his breast; and, like an answer to the dumb utterances of her soul, sprang the words to his lips, words spoken with ineffable pity,—“Poor swan!”

Ernestine instantly withdrew her hands from her face, and stared at him with wide-open eyes. She started to her feet. A dark flush spread over her pale face, and her whole frame shivered. She looked at him with intensity of emotion, and

the longer she looked the more intense became that emotion. "There is but *one* man on earth who could know that," she said faintly.

"Know what?" asked Johannes, with beating heart.

"That which I was thinking—that about the swan," she said with difficulty, for her voice failed her.

Johannes stood lower than Ernestine; he looked up at her and said, full of expectation, "And who is he?"

Ernestine could not answer; she trembled with mysterious fear, waiting for the revelation every moment might bring with it.

"Ernestine, can you remember the boy who once saved you when your life was in danger?"

She bent her head,—*"Yes."*

"Ernestine, have you sometimes, only for a moment, thought with love of him in your childish heart?"

She raised her eyes to the dusky evening sky, and was silent. At last she whispered rather than spoke, *"Yes."*

A white faint cloud was passing over their heads. Was it the little mermaid who had died for her love, and melted into foam, and been borne aloft by the daughters of the air to eternal blessedness? Was that almost forgotten love-dream of childhood—the only one she had ever dreamed—coming back again?

She looked after the fleeting vapour, as it grew fainter and fainter, till it melted away into transparent air, and the evening star, with gentle beams, rose where it had vanished.

"Ernestine, do you recognise me?" cried Johannes. "Look how God has a second time placed me at your side to be your protector against a danger you have brought upon yourself now as before, when I saved you from a broken bough. And now I spread my arms to you, and say, Fly here, you will be safe. O, little dryad! you are the same as of old, however you may have grown in height and beauty! Yours are the same perplexing dark eyes; yours is the same solitary headstrong spirit, imprisoned in the same tender body, proclaiming its Titanic ancestry. Then, when I first saw you, I knew that there could be but *one*

being on earth such as you, and I should have known you again amid a thousand, and I did recognise you at once when I saw you here standing on this mound. O wondrous, mysterious being! do not vanish from me in a waft of fragrance, but come to this heart. If an earth-born man such as I may dare to approach you, take me as your friend, and learn to love. O noble, ethereal genius, for which earth is not a home, I am only a man, but I dare to say it, an honourable, true, and loving man. Will you not trust your fate to such an one?"

Ernestine stood motionless, she had pressed her folded hands on her brow, as one does when incomprehensible things, things we cannot realize, come crowding in upon us.

"You are silent. Have you no word for me? Ernestine look at me. Have you forgotten him round whose neck you once cast your trembling arms?"

Then she stretched forth her hands as if to greet the eager speaker, with an expression of boundless joy on her face—"Johannes," she cried, and the tears flowed down and dropped on her maiden bosom—"Johannes Möllner! O friend of my childhood, I do know you again!"

Exultant he sprang up the mound. He spread out his arms to clasp her to his breast; but she drew back startled, and a deep shame, an almost childish fear, pictured itself on her blushing countenance; so that Johannes, abashed, ventured only to press his lips to her delicate fingers. This maidenly modesty was to him holy, superlatively holy and precious.

CHAPTER III.

NOT AT HOME.

THAT same evening there was a large gathering of professors at the house of Madam Möllner. Johannes had clean forgotten all about it. When dinner, afternoon and evening passed without his appearing, his mother became anxious about him, apart from the awkwardness of having to apologize to the guests for the absence of their host. She paced up and down the garden behind the house, awaiting the arrivals of those invited, who were to spend the evening in the open air.

Then Angelica came flying to her.

"Mother, mother! now I know where Johannes has spent the day," she cried to Madam Möllner, as she pulled the hat off her heated head, and threw herself into a garden chair. "Maurice has just returned from Hochstetten, whither he was summoned this afternoon, with a wonderful tale. He found the whole village in an uproar; Fräulein Hartwich's conduct has provoked a revolution. There was quite a riot, and Johannes, *our* Johannes, stood forward openly as her knight."

The widow clasped her hands, and looked at Angelica with doubt. "Is this true?"

"It is true enough, and there's more behind," said Angelica, impatiently. "Maurice could not get a glimpse of Johannes, for he was, and remained,—be quiet, mother, don't be too angry—with that Hartwich girl in her castle."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the old lady, and she sank on a bench, "have matters gone as far as this." A long

pause ensued. The distressed mother folded her hands on her lap, and said, sadly, "My son, my son, whither is fate drawing you?"

Angelica turned aside without speaking. The same evening star, which was shining down with such gentle light on Johannes and Ernestine, was reflected in the tears of his sister, as she looked towards it.

"Angelica," said the mother, "you should not have told me this without preparation. You cannot bring yourself to remember that I am old, and shaken by many blows of fortune, so that I have not now the nerve to bear up against bad news. What have I not undergone since the bankruptcy of your uncle Neuenstein? All sorts of misfortune have come to us from Unkenheim; the unlucky thought of your uncle to buy Hartwich's factory, the loss of three quarters of our fortune sunk in the business, and in consequence, the necessity for Johannes to earn his livelihood and, therefore, to leave home. Nothing of all this would have come to pass if we had avoided Unkenheim. And now—this Hartwich girl!—she comes thence also! You will see, she will bring us more sorrow. O, my God! when shall we be able to breathe freely? Why is this unnatural creature to come and disturb our so dearly-purchased tranquillity of soul?"

"Mother, dear," said Angelica, kneeling down by Madam Möllner. "Mother, dear, don't give way now that the guests are arriving. Compose yourself, things have not as yet got to the pass you fear. Do be my own strong, self-possessed mother again, who never was so great as in adversity. I trust in God—and in our Johannes."

She had not time to say more, for she started up to meet the first arrivals who appeared at the garden-door. The old lady, accustomed to self-restraint, quickly recovered her composure, and was ready to receive the guests with her usual lady-like courtesy.

"Where is your son?"

"Is not your son at home?"

Full twenty times were these questions asked and answered with inexhaustible patience:—"He is obliged to

be away on important business, but I hope he will be with us shortly."

Now came old Councillor Heim, and with smiles heard from Angelica the dreadful tale, told in a whisper.

"The rogue, Johannes," he said, with cheery good-humour, "so he is with *her*—with her in the castle! On my word things are in train."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Angelica, "is this all the sympathy we can expect of you in so serious a matter?"

"Why, my dear child, I don't see anything very serious in it. Johannes is a man who has his wits about him. You seem to regard him as a young greenhorn, who wants his nurse to be always at his heels. If the clever girl pleases him, I can commend his taste. It's of no use; you won't make me your confederate, however piteously you may look at me out of your forget-me-not blue eyes." And the old gentleman seated himself comfortably on Angelica's straw hat, which she had forgotten to remove from the chair.

"Goodness gracious! what sort of a cushion have you provided for me?" he exclaimed, starting up, and producing the hat of straw and violets reduced to a pancake, amidst a general burst of merriment.

"Well, that is the consequence of leaving things about. I never dreamed that I should ever be honoured with a straw hat to sit in. Never mind, my child, be consoled; as lawyers term it, you are under coverture, so you can do without a hat. Anyhow, here's one piece of ill-luck to-day."

The company began to arrive rapidly. The ladies seated themselves round a tea-table, the gentlemen stood about in groups; in such an al-fresco party they were allowed to smoke, and so they puffed blue cloudlets into the air, and drank beer. The moon began to pour dim beams through the rosy glow of evening, the moths hovered about, and now and then a stag-beetle passed thrumming like the vibrating string of a bass-viol, and bounced against the ladies' heads. The wearied birds hovered from bush to bush seeking quarters for the night; and, flying low, alarmed the young girls, who persisted in supposing them to be bats.

Presently a wiry voice was heard without, twittering Rückert's song:—

“A little parlour trim and gay,
A little maiden bright;
O, who shall be my guest to-day?
O, who within invite?”

and Elsa, accompanied by her brother, appeared at the door. The hostess rose.

“O, my dearest, most motherly friend?” exclaimed Elsa from afar, and fluttered to meet her. “I’m dreadfully late I know. If my thoughts could have borne me, I should have been here long ago, but the wheel of our fly broke, and we were obliged to come on foot.”

“I am very sorry,” said the hostess. “I fear you have had a fright.”

“Yes, it was not an agreeable intermezzo, disturbing the anticipations of a happy evening in which we were revelling when the accident occurred,” said Herbert.

“O, it did not disturb my happy dream for one moment,” said Elsa, with charming vivacity, and she chirped the closing lines of her song:—

‘And ’neath the flowers our grave will be
If from the carriage spilt.’

The only thing that distressed me was that I was delayed in coming here, and so I ran till I was out of breath.”

“Surely not quite,” said Madam Möllner, smiling; “you warbled on the road as you came along.”

“Did you hear me?” asked Elsa coyly. “Then my voice was more fortunate than myself in reaching you first. But now our welcome must be ratified with a kiss.” She jumped up to the tall lady and pressed a damp kiss on her cheek, which her hostess, out of courtesy, could not venture to wipe off, and was obliged to allow to evaporate of itself.

“How is your wife?” asked Madam Möllner of Herbert.

“Thank you, much the same. The constant spectacle of her suffering without the power to relieve it is very trying.”

The hostess looked with compassion on the sunken cheeks of Herbert. "Poor woman ; but you also are to be pitied."

"I thank you for your sympathy ; it lightens the load of anxiety that I have to bear."

Elsa did not hear this conversation. Flighty by nature, she had run off to join the company, whilst Herbert followed slowly with the hostess.

"A bat, a bat !" exclaimed one of the young men as she approached, pointing, however, to a bird that flew by.

"You are satirical, colleague," said another, aside.

"Do look there," whispered a third. "There is Herbert again in a dress coat. Is it fair to come in evening dress, when he knows that we all are agreed to meet at one another's houses in morning costume ?"

"It is the way of the fellow. You can't break him of it," said Taun. "Who expects good-fellowship of Herbert."

"The fool !" said Meibert ; "I would not have joined our little society, if it had not been agreed that there should be no ceremony in our meetings."

"Nor would I." "Nor I !" exclaimed most of those present, stretching themselves comfortably in their easy coats.

Elsa, in the meanwhile, was nodding right and left. She was happy in her consciousness that she was filling everyone with pleasure by her presence. She was fond of all, and all were fond of her. Earth was to her a Paradise of faith, and love, and hope, through which she roamed to her own and others' content, as a beneficent, smiling fairy. She was a little startled at not being able to light on Möllner, and her anticipations seemed doomed to undergo a severer shock than that which nearly gave her "beneath the flowers a grave." But she comforted herself with the thought that he must come, he surely would come, he could not stay away when Elsa was there. But she was resolved not to let the company suffer for her disappointment by withdrawing from the conversation. There was an amiable side to her vanity. She did not wish to deprive others of the privilege of seeing and hearing her. She was confident of possessing rare conversational gifts, and she was proud of them only that she might be able to amuse her special friends. It never entered

her head that she was an object of ridicule. She saw that when she appeared merriment followed, and she attributed it to delight at her presence. Her reliance on the regard and love of her fellows was immovable; for it was rooted in her all-engrossing self-confidence. Who would not love a being so good, so richly endowed, so little conceited at her own superiority, so kind-hearted and sociable towards all? Who could fail to do so? This assurance gave Elsa her unabashed cheerfulness in society, and carried her not merely unwounded through the thorns and nettles of ridicule and contempt, but with perfect self-satisfaction. It was well for her she enjoyed the blessing without feeling the curse which rests on mediocrity.

To-day she was quite idyllic. For Elsa abroad was different from, but quite as delightful as, Elsa in the studio.

She wore her broad-brimmed straw hat, the great brim of which was incessantly flapping up and down; a green wreath surrounded it, and a bunch of field-flowers graced her bosom. She preferred the flowers of the field to garden-flowers. Everyone took notice of the latter. She constituted herself the champion of the former: she would reconcile them, by her love, to being overlooked by the many. Her refined taste, moreover, discovered the beautiful where to others it was invisible. No need for a blaze of colour and grace of form to prove to her the wisdom of the Creator. She shewed her esteem for every daisy and every blade of grass. Each was beautifully made, and was so truly a type of modesty withdrawing from the superficial gaze, that she took it as a type of herself—Elsa, an unassuming beauty! Again, it was the privilege of poetic natures to see something where others saw nothing. Her tender heart accordingly felt a shock when the Professor of Botany said to her, "Why, Fräulein Elsa, how is it that you come with a wisp of hay in your bosom to a house where arrangements are made to entertain on so grand a scale?"

"You are a naughty man," said she, giggling; "but your sarcasm will not wound my little *protégées*."

"Do you call the meadow-flowers your *protégées*? Then

you must be hard put to to protect them when the cattle are driven to pasture."

All laughed, and Elsa also; for Elsa could understand a joke!

"Why," she answered, "to fall victims to the strong is a fate from which Flora herself could not save them. However, thank goodness! they grow again. Besides, I do not pretend to protect them from the beasts, for whose subsistence thy serve. What a beautiful lot, to give life to another by the sacrifice of your own! I only undertake their protection against the disregard of men. Is it not a sacred duty to encourage the unappreciated? And he who does not conscientiously execute this duty in trifles will not do so in great matters. Therefore I will put my poor, thirsty flowers in water, that they may raise their drooping heads again."

She was offered a glass of water, and the Professor of Botany attempted to put a lump of sugar in it, to sweeten the short remaining span of life of these neglected beauties.

"Go along, go along, you intolerable man!" scolded Elsa, as she arranged her bouquet. "Look, now. Is not this pretty?"

"My dear young lady," said the Professor, "do not ask me to fall into raptures over the beauty of a flower. Aesthetic pleasure derived from the sight of a flower is a thing of the past with me. To me the most beautiful herb is that which affords the greatest results in my examination of its structure."

"What a vapid pleasure!" exclaimed Elsa. "Ladies, tell me if there be anything more unnatural than a botanist who does not love flowers? Is he not as great an incongruity as a musician who does not care for music? Is not this a treason against the *scientia amabilis*?"

"You say this," answered the Professor, testily, "because you have no conception of what men now-a-days call the 'amiable science.' As De Bary asserted, so do I declare—modern botany has no more right to this predicate than any other science. The science of botany does not consist in knowing a couple of thousand plants' names and the habits of these plants, but in the study of their processes of life—in a word, in plant-physiology. The flower is not the end of our pursuit, but the means by which we seek our aim, and

that aim is the same as in physics, physiology, and the exact sciences; it is the knowledge of the whole through the knowledge of a part. Be that part plant, or man, or beast, in each we are seeking the same law; and it is just as unimportant in his branch of study whether the botanist loves flowers as it is whether the physiologist loves men."

Elsa blushed at these words. "Möllner," she said, "I am sure, loves men."

"So much the better," said the Professor, smiling; "that is a privilege we will not dispute with him. But to a physiologist's eyes a man is not more than a plant, and a plant is not more than a man. Each is merely an object of study."

"I will never believe that of Möllner!" sighed Elsa.

The botanist shrugged his shoulders, and turned away. When he came to his colleagues they set upon him. "One can see that you are a new comer, or you would not take the trouble to preach sense to Elsa Herbert." And, "How can you get women to understand these matters?" Then there was a laugh, in which all joined except young Hilsborn, who disliked these jokes. Though he had an insuperable aversion to Elsa, yet he was too generous to give vent to it.

"We must do what we can to enlighten stupidity, if only for our own sake," said the botanist, in self-defence. "It is impossible to hear trash talked and keep silence."

"Well, Fräulein Elsa, so you think it would be a glorious fate to be eaten by a cow?" exclaimed a young private tutor, only recently escaped from undergraduateship.

Elsa was delighted to have engaged the gentlemen's attention. It was clear to her that her brilliant conversation was enlivening the party. She was in the best humour. What a pity that Möllner was not there to witness her triumph.

"Yes," she said, gaily, "the perishable flower cannot die a more lovely death than—"

"Than in the stomach of a cow," said the sceptic. "What a pity that Fechner did not know this poetic aspect of the matter before he wrote his 'Nanna.' He would certainly have made use of it."

"It is easy enough in this way to travesty anything," said Elsa.

"Do not let good Elsa be angry with me," interrupted Angelica, as she laid her soft, plump arm over Elsa's pointed shoulder. "Give me the flowers, please."

"Yes, if you will put them on your brother's writing-table," she whispered into Angelica's ear.

Angelica gave her a pitying glance. "I will do so, Elsa; but you know he does not care for cut flowers."

"Perhaps he will value them for the sake of a true friend who has plucked them."

Angelica took the bouquet with a look of dismay, and said, hesitatingly, "I will venture; but you know he does not like these things on his table, and he may be offended."

Precipitate, as was his wont, Maurice came rushing into the garden. Angelica was bowed over Elsa, when she felt a burning kiss on her neck, and the flashing black eyes of her husband met hers.

"Maurice!" exclaimed she, with pleasure, putting her cheek against his, "are you here at last?"

"Yes, wife, darling. I was obliged to attend another patient; but now I shall remain at your side till to-morrow morning at eight. Twelve whole hours. Will that satisfy you?"

"Will it satisfy me!" repeated Angelica. Poor Elsa, who was witness of these endearments, felt a thrill go through her at the thought of such love ever being shewn to her.

"Well now," said old Heim, plucking Maurice by the coat, "you will never have done making love to your wife and spoiling our appetite. Your mother-in-law asks you to act as host at table."

"Come, Angelica," said Maurice, taking his wife's arm in his; for he never would lead another woman to table.

Now a cruel moment for Elsa had arrived; for it was her unaccountable fate always to be a wall-flower when others danced, and to be without a gentleman when an arm was wanted to conduct her to table. On this occasion she would have been again condemned to drag behind alone, or left hanging on to the arm of another lady, had not the last gentleman, who had a lady on his right arm, out of compassion offered her also his left. Alas! her knight, her

Lohengrin, was not there : he who was to save her from the last and most dreadful sitting out in the cold ! Where was he ? Why did he not come ? And in her heartache she turned to one of the gentlemen who was approaching the circle of ladies to offer them gallantries redolent of cigar, breathed into nose and ear.

“ Do you know where Professor Möllner is ? ”

The gentleman was a young surgeon whom Maurice had taken with him to Hochstetten. Dr. Kern was just in time to whisper to him, “ Not a word ! ”

The gentleman addressed put on a face of perplexity, when Herbert stepped up and asked, mischievously, “ By the way, you were this afternoon at Hochstetten, where Professor Möllner is practising, as usual, his office of Good Samaritan. I heard you say as much to Hilsborn. Pray be so good as to tell us all the circumstances. ”

He laid his hand, as if accidentally, on the shoulder of his sister, but the pressure of his sharp knuckle let her understand that there was neither accident nor amiability in the action.

“ Every one knows that Möllner is not a man to allow any one to be insulted with impunity, ” said Hilsborn, “ and that you, Herbert, have good reason to be aware of. ”

“ I have, indeed, had occasion to feel the interest Möllner takes in Fräulein von Hartwich ; but the danger from an erring colleague was more easily averted than that which threatened from an exasperated rabble. ”

“ What—what is this ? ” flew from mouth to mouth ; and the company assembled about the speakers.

Maurice said, aloud and peremptorily, to Herbert, “ You will allow me, please, to act as interpreter of the acts of my brother-in-law, as I happen to be better acquainted with his motives than a stranger can possibly be. Fräulein von Hartwich was grossly insulted by a crowd at Hochstetten, and my brother-in-law had to protect her from stones flung at her. ”

“ Oh, ” said Herbert, with an affectation of surprise, “ what a noble motive to have impelled him to drive eight miles to that little village ! ”

"It is not my place to discuss the motives of my brother-in-law. I leave to you the delicate and risky office of calling them in question." Maurice fixed a look full of defiance on Herbert, as he made this answer.

"But what has happened?"

"But what has this Hartwich girl been doing? A whole village will not rise in riot without a cause."

"What an awful creature this Hartwich must be!"

Such exclamations flew about like cross-shots.

"Gentlemen, I must beg you to take the ladies to table," said the hostess, who stood on pins and needles.

But this hint was unnoticed. The ladies, and, indeed, some of the gentlemen, flew on the topic like hungry wolves ravening for food, and regardless of everything else. There was no limit to their dismay and astonishment. It was not, of course, seemly to say what was thought before the friends and relations of Möllner, but it was possible to ask awkward questions without risk of rudeness. They could not understand why Professor Möllner should associate himself with such a person. They were not sorry that popular opinion had spoken out so plainly against her.

"No," said Elsa, "Christian charity has compassion on the worst sinner: but this lady places our sex in such a light that one feels inclined to blush to be a woman. 'I am so good to all,' I may say with Gretchen, but this Hartwich damsel exhibits a shamelessness and want of refinement of feeling which make it the duty of every sensitive soul to restrain its first impulses of pity towards her, and to hold her at a distance."

"Tell me, Fräulein Elsa," interrupted Hilsborn, "what comes of your pretty theory about protecting the misunderstood, to which you gave utterance not long ago with reference to the common field-flowers?"

Elsa blushed, and confusedly swept back her mane of hair. "But, my dear friend," said the botanist, "Fräulein Hartwich is no field-flower!"

"Certainly not one that the cows would eat, for she is poisonous," said Herbert.

"There are insects and worms which gnaw even at the

hellebore," said old Heim, angrily. "Hellebore or belladonna, be it which it may, has its proper use in medicine, and may serve as an antidote to the affectation and mock-modesty which are the poison of womanhood nowadays, and the fruitful source of bigotry, spite, and all kinds of moral maladies. So this poor damsel may be of use after all."

"That is rather too hard," whispered Maurice to him, as he passed, with his hands behind his back. "But I must not scold you," he went on; "I must keep my scoldings for Johannes. However, I wish the girl may be carried off by Old Scratch before Johannes is hooked by her."

Heim looked after him, and his white, bushy eyebrows contracted. "I will not answer such nonsense otherwise than by saying, 'Wait and see.'"

The lady of the house approached. "Uncle Heim, you are a blind partisan; but prove to us that this person is not a bold adventuress, seeking popular applause, or goodness knows what else, and we will apologize to her; but till this is done you must excuse us if we regret that my son has been brought into any sort of connection with her. And now give me your arm; we *must* go to table."

"That is a nice task you set me: to thrash empty husks for a meal," said the old gentleman, and he led Madam Möllner to the house, for supper was laid indoors.

The rest followed, and Elsa fluttered in the rear as the last swallow. The garden was left, and the whole company was flowing into the hall, entering from the garden-door. Opposite was the front-door, opening on the street. The party were ascending the steps from the garden, when a carriage was heard driving up. It stopped before the house. The hostess stood still and listened. The train in her rear came to a standstill also. That must be Johannes.

The front-door was hastily thrown open, and he who was expected appeared—but not alone. Good Heavens! he held a lady on his arm.

An exclamation of astonishment burst from every lip.

Johannes was as startled by this unexpected meeting as the company was at seeing him arrive with a veiled lady. The latter shrank back and sought to retire when she saw

so many people drawn up, as it were in column, to repel the invasion. But Johannes held her fast. "Stay, Fräulein," he said, aloud; "there is no reason for your avoiding any one here."

Madam Möllner leaned heavily on Heim's arm. Her knees trembled under her.

"Pray compose yourself," whispered the old man in her ear; "what can't be cured must be endured. And remember that this is your son's own house."

"I shall not forget it," she answered, in a low tone, with bitter emphasis.

In the meantime Johannes had reached the steps, with Ernestine hanging back with evident reluctance.

"My dear mother, I bring you a guest," he said, with happiness beaming from his face.

The lady of the house descended a couple of steps. But there was a cold restraint in her countenance, such as is shewn to a visitor whose presence is not desired.

"Fräulein von Hartwich," said Johannes, introducing her at once to his mother and to the whole company. "Fräulein von Hartwich has allowed herself to be persuaded by me to place herself in security for this night under our roof, as her uncle is absent, and she cannot remain unprotected from the consequences of a disgraceful intrigue."

"You are welcome, Fräulein," said the hostess, with frozen politeness, and without offering Ernestine her hand, or making the slightest attempt to release her from her painful situation. "May I ask you to share our simple meal? I regret to say we cannot postpone it any longer, as we have already been kept waiting for my son."

Without paying any further attention to Ernestine, she walked on with Heim to the dining-room.

Ernestine's heart stood still as she felt the chill of this reception—the humiliation to which she was subjected. This was worse than running the gauntlet before the rude peasants, and being pelted by their gibes and stones.

"Let me go," she said, withdrawing her hand from the arm of Johannes. "I feel that I am unwelcome to your mother."

"Ernestine," said he, "you are *my* guest, and I will not let you go. Forgive my mother this stiff reception. It is not offered to you, but to the caricature which has been drawn of you by popular prejudice. Remain here, and convince the old lady how different you are from what she has fancied, and she will receive and love you as a daughter."

"Oh, my friend!—my only friend!—I will obey; but I do so with a heavy heart. It would have been better for me to have taken refuge for a couple of days with Herr Leonhardt."

"You could not have gone to him," interrupted Johannes; "he would have been made to suffer for it, had he sheltered you. And you could not have spent the night alone in the castle, with your uncle absent. Either course was impossible. There remained no course open to you but placing yourself under my protection. Is that such a hardship?"

"No," said Ernestine, looking gratefully at him, "it is not that; it is that the others——"

"I deeply regret that we should have fallen on this swarm. If we had not arrived at that identical moment, so as to meet in the hall, all would have gone well. I could have taken you to my study, which is never invaded, and there you could have rested till the company had dispersed, and then my mother would have provided you with a comfortable bedroom. But as things have come about so, you must not hide like a criminal, but go into the midst of the company, and show them how noble you are. There are several here whose regard you can easily win."

"I am more afraid of these people than of the furious peasants," said Ernestine; "and I am tired out."

"My poor child!" said Johannes, pitifully; "I can well believe it, but it must be done—if only for my sake. Will you try? I should be so proud to seat you by me, and allow myself to be recognised by all as your friend."

"Well, I will submit," said Ernestine, resignedly, and entered the hall with Johannes.

At the door of the dining-room he removed her hat and cloak, and contemplated with admiration her pale beautiful face, with its noble intellectual brow, the large sorrowful

eyes, the tall slender form draped in simple muslin. Who that saw her could resist the charm? He was proud of her.

The company stood round the table waiting, as he entered with her. The impression produced by her appearance was all the more striking. It was as if one of the pale, ghostly women from Kaulbach's *Battle of the Huns* had stepped out of the canvas. No one there had seen before such ideal and yet such gloomy beauty. The buzz of voices hushed instantaneously, and all looked with utmost curiosity at the strange apparition.

"Thunder! the woman is dangerous!" whispered Maurice to the hostess.

"She is so," answered Madam Möllner, unable to detach her eyes from Ernestine. "My poor, poor Johannes."

"Come, one doesn't see the like of her every day," muttered old Heim, proudly, "I always prophesied she would be a beauty."

"She is heavenly, and I must love her, say what you will," whispered Angelica, and flew, regardless of mother and husband, to Ernestine, who stood before all these eyes and underwent criticism with painful embarrassment. "Fräulein Ernestine, do you remember me?"

Ernestine looked at her for a few seconds, and then said, "You must be little Angelica."

"Rightly guessed," said the young wife, and standing on tiptoe she pressed her cherry lips on Ernestine's mouth.

Then Maurice came up, and said in his rough joking manner, "And I am Angelica's husband. My name is Kern, and I am one of the barbarians who chose to exclude a beautiful woman from our lecture-rooms."

Ernestine looked at him with open eyes. She quickly caught his blunt good humour, and smiled.

"Well," he said, "I am not sorry for what I did, now that I see you; for if the young fellows had been allowed to sit side-by-side with you, they would not have had eyes and ears for the lecturer, that is positive."

Ernestine looked down, startled and ashamed.

Maurice studied her a while, and then slapping Johannes

on the shoulder, whispered to him, "'Pon my word I can't blame you for admiring her."

"That is the way of men," said Madam Möllner aside to Frau Meibert; "my son-in-law, who has usually no eyes for a woman, is won already by her pretty mask."

"Yes, and look at my old man steering towards her," was the answer. "But there's no denying she is shy and innocent."

"Still waters run deep," said the hostess.

"That is true enough," answered the other.

"What do you think, Professor?" asked Frau Taun of Herbert, as she nodded in the direction of Ernestine, "will it not be possible next winter to have tableaux vivants? Don't you think that she and Angelica as the two Leonoras would do admirably?"

"But, my dear," said Frau Bert, "you forget that Angelica will not be able, possibly, to appear in a tableau vivant next winter."

"Oh, I forgot! That is the worst of young wives, one can't reckon on them. It is a pity my daughter is a brunette; two brunettes together would not do."

"Would it not be well to have Hercules and Omphale? Make Fräulein Hartwich assume the masculine characteristics of Omphale, and seat Professor Möllner before a spinning-wheel. What a picture it would make!" It was Herbert who spoke with a bitter curl of his lip.

"I know you do not like her," said Frau Taun; "but since I have seen her I cannot believe all the evil reports circulating about her. Besides, Möllner is not the man to sit at a spinning-wheel, even if she be something of an Omphale. So your suggestion is not a happy one, to my taste."

Herbert shrugged his shoulders.

"Now, my dear Fräulein," said Möllner, in his distinctest tone, "allow me to introduce some of my friends and your foes to you, that you may become better acquainted with one another. This is an old acquaintance of yours, Professor Hilsborn. Do you remember him?"

Ernestine thought a moment, but could not recall him.

"We met at a child's party," said Hilsborn, "and we tried which could hit a glass-ball on a jet of water. You succeeded where we all failed, and became accordingly an object of envy to many."

Ernestine coloured. "O, yes! now I remember. You were a gentle, kindly, boy, the adopted son of Herr Heim. But where—where is Heim?"

"Here he is," said the old gentleman, looking at her with his piercing eyes. Ernestine held out her hand to him, but could not bear his gaze, and looked down.

"O, father Heim!—if I may call you so."

"Do so, indeed," said the old man. "So you have not forgotten me?" And he took her head between his hands.

"How could I forget one who saved me when in great danger."

"Well," said Heim, so low that none but Ernestine could hear, "do you know, child, I have always loved you, and now I claim the right to act as your protector. But, between ourselves, let me tell you that my heart bleeds for you, and if I did not hope that all the stupid nonsense stuffed into your head would come out, and better stuff take its place, I should look back with regret to the time when I patched up the poor little broken noddle. There now, don't take it amiss that I have said this. Perhaps you would rather hear the truth from some one else. And now may God bless your entry into this house."

Ernestine did not answer; but she felt deeply what he said.

A tear hung on her eye-lash, as she stood silent before him. Then Möllner offered her his right arm, and the company took their places at table. On her right sat Heim; opposite were Taun and Hilsborn; then Maurice with Angelica, and Herbert and Madam Taun. On the other side of Heim sat Madam Möllner.

"Will you allow me to introduce to you my colleague Taun?" said Möllner, after they were seated.

"A friend," added Taun.

"One of those who voted for you," explained Möllner.

"O! I thank you, Sir, in the name of my sex," said Ernestine.

"I must not lay claim to this thanks alone; my dear colleagues Heim and Hilsborn have an equal right to it, for they fought your battle much more zealously than I who did not know you."

"Indeed! Father Heim! Did you speak for me?" asked Ernestine, in surprise.

"Well, then, I did," grumbled Heim, vexed at Taun for having spoken of the matter. "The trifle you sent in was not bad on the whole, and I thought it better for you to exhaust your energies in this direction, than—" his bass voice sank to a whisper, "than attacking the good God as a dog barks at the moon, and scaring all decent folk by your atheistical balderdash."

Ernestine sank back as though struck by lightning. So this was what she was reproached with! She was amazed. In enlightened circles there were really men who were offended at unbelief? Had Leuthold lied to her when he represented true education as synonymous with the abandonment of all religious prejudices? But what circle could be called enlightened if this, containing so many men of scientific mark, was not accounted one?

"Has the rough outside of our friend hurt you!" said Taun, distressed to see Ernestine's confusion. "You ought to know that a noble kernel is enveloped in this hard shell."

"Who is speaking of me?" shouted Maurice. "You are speaking of a noble Kern, that can be only me."

"*Kernel* not *Kern*, dear fellow," said Johannes, beckoning to him to be quiet. "Leave those three alone."

Ernestine looked sadly at Heim. "Father Heim was more considerate towards me once on a time."

"I have no doubt about it," said the old Councillor, gently, "you were a little silver-paper bit of a creature then, to be blown away by a breath. One was only too glad if you lived, and in anxiety over your bodily welfare; so that, as is often the case with delicate children, one did not pay sufficient regard to the ugly twist in your ideas."

"Now, then, leave this topic," said Taun; "you, Fräulein, will soon learn in which direction you ought to go, and so I am not alarmed about you. Your writings prove that you have unusual talent, and that you will certainly prove to be the most learned woman of this century."

Ernestine's eyes sparkled. She raised her head like a parched flower over which water has been poured. "The most learned woman of this century!" These words fell kindling into the powder magazine of her ambition. Heim's rudeness was forgotten. "And this you say in a century which honours a Caroline Herschel and a Dorothea Rodde?"

Herbert, who had been listening to this conversation from afar, turned to Maurice, and asked in a low tone, "Who was this Dorothea Rodde? One has heard of the sister of Herschel simply because she was the sister of *Herschel*; but I know nothing of the other."

"Well, come, that is asking too much!" laughed Maurice, "How can one be expected to bother one's head about the performances of all sorts of blue-stockings which some sympathetic Frauenlob may have immortalized in a rubbishy article for the *Gazette des Dames*?"

A dark look flashed at him from Ernestine. She had caught the subject of their remarks, and hot anger boiled in her heart.

To make matters worse, Angelica said across the table, "Johannes, the gentlemen are wondering who Dorothea Rodde was."

Johannes shrugged his shoulders. "I know no more than the man in the moon."

"You—*you* don't know!" exclaimed Ernestine. "Is this possible. Does no one know of the great daughter of the savant Schlözer? She died in eighteen hundred and twenty-four, and is she already forgotten?"

"She cannot have contributed anything of importance to science, or her name would not have dropped into oblivion," said Johannes.

"Such a remarkable phenomenon as this woman ought, I fancy, to have been regarded as of importance to science,

even if she did not make any contribution to it. It is interesting enough both for a psychologist and for a physiologist to know that a woman was capable of acquiring as much as did Dorothea Rodde, even if she took no place as a teacher. Everyone is not an originator, and there are many men's names held in honour not because they discovered anything fresh, but because they devoted themselves diligently to study. Besides, Dorothea would no doubt have done great things had she not committed the folly of marrying, and so nipping her scientific development in the bud, and indeed abandoning her pursuits altogether. She buried herself alive, and the world is only too eager to strew ashes over the grave of a *woman*. Had she been a man, the fame of her abilities as a phenomenon capable of speaking all the dead and living languages, profoundly versed in chemistry, medicine, anatomy, and mineralogy—at seventeen, would not have been forgotten. At eighteen she was examined and accorded her degree as Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Göttingen. But she was 'only a girl' when she shewed such extraordinary talents. An earlier and less egoistic and envious age gave recognition to these powers in woman—it was reserved for this more enlightened one to exhibit its bigotry and prejudice by refusing it."

A painful pause ensued. Everyone was occupied with his own thoughts; each was unpleasantly affected by this speech.

The beautiful, quiet Ernestine had suddenly shown her claws.

Madam Möllner laid down her knife and fork. She had lost all desire to eat.

Johannes looked at Ernestine with annoyance and shook his head.

Herbert alone was the more pleased the graver the others became. He looked over at Elsa who sat at the other end of the table, buried in her day dreams, and plucking flowers and grass out of the vases on the table, wherewith to trick herself out as an Ophelia,—but alas! Hamlet had no eyes for her innocent madness! "Might I ask you to introduce me to the lady?" asked Herbert of Johannes.

"Professor Herbert," said the latter, and added emphatically, "your bitterest opponent."

Ernestine bowed slightly, and measured Herbert with a look of hostility.

"Would you allow me to ask," he began mischievously, "how it is, Fräulein, that you consider the fact of a woman being able to speak *some* languages,—for she could hardly have spoken *all*, as you asserted—to be of any importance to science?"

"Ah! I should like to know that, too," shouted Maurice.

Ernestine looked firmly at them both. "I am quite ready to inform you. I should not have ventured to do so had you not asked me; for I should have thought you would have considered it an insult to be regarded as ignorant on this point."

"The shot has hit its mark," said Maurice, merrily.

"I am prepared with my answer, gentlemen," said Ernestine; "I am well aware that I have to deal with opponents. To me it seems that the intellectual activity and attainments of a Dorothea Rodde are of quite as much importance in the natural history of women as are examples of remarkable instinct so diligently collected by zoologists in the natural history of animals,—that is, if woman is treated as an object of study equal in interest with an ape."

"We are not accustomed to regard and treat women in this light," said Möllner, gravely.

"Well, suppose you allow her a place on the same scale in nature as yourselves; then Dorothea's brilliant talents are of importance to science, as material for the determination of the relations borne by the female to the male brain. This is a question not yet solved, and one the social importance of which is not yet realized, or it would not be thrust aside or passed over with such frivolous indifference. Gentlemen, I am myself convinced that the great struggle for the emancipation of woman can only be fought out to a definite conclusion on the comparative anatomy of the brain; for physiology alone is capable of proving by demonstration that all the material conditions for thought exist in woman in precisely the same proportion as in man. And if this be

once established, who can dare to deny woman the right to take her place independently face to face with man in the intellectual world?"

"But this is exactly what is *not* yet established," said Johannes.

"No, but the contrary is not proved," said Ernestine. "And that is why I think physiology might profitably turn over the pages of history and give its attention to the chapter on famous women."

"With what result?"

"How can you ask this seriously? Would not a result favourable to woman alter radically the whole social relations with man? And would it not be a triumph to physiology thus to step into the position of ethical authority?"

"It would be all very well," observed Maurice, "if the question were worth the trouble."

"It may not be so to *you*, but to us it is! What do you care about the position of women, their capabilities or want of them? If your wives take what you consider their right place,—that is, if they become dutiful slaves, and can cook and bring up children, that is all you want, and the first question man asks of the constitution of the world is answered satisfactorily to him at least."

This assertion was responded to with a general growl of dissatisfaction, but Ernestine's passion was roused, and she went on regardless of everything, "It was grief at this narrow-minded indifference which drove me to the study of natural science. I, gentlemen, will do my best to direct the attention of the learned to this important question, and to stimulate experiment for its solution. If I do not succeed myself in making any discoveries in this field, I may be the means of enabling others to do so; and to this end I devote my existence. If in some less scrupulous university I be admitted to the dissecting tables, and allowed the opportunities of making the necessary anatomical and physiological studies, then my time and energies will be given up exclusively to these experiments of equal psychical and physical importance."

"But, Fräulein," said Johannes gloomily, "what more do

you want? We know already for certain that woman's brain weighs less than that of a man ——"

"Does everything depend on weight?"

"No, but generally."

"Generally, may be. But one exception upsets the theory that it does. No doubt that Byron, Cuvier, and others, had remarkably heavy brains, but then the brains of other men of learning, as Hermann and Hauptmann were lighter than normal women's brains. Intellectual ability depends not so much on absolute as on relative weight, on the balance between the hemispheres of the brain, on the convolutions in it, on the texture and dissemination of the grey matter in it. The only certain fact that physiology has established in this department, is that woman's brain is not relatively lighter than man's." She raised her eyes full of enthusiasm. "Oh! if I could but throw light—if it were but a spark—on this dark subject, I could die happy."

"But, Fräulein," said Herbert, dogmatically, "as woman is in every particular more delicate and feeble than man, it is only natural that she should have a lighter brain than man, and one less adapted to hard and prolonged thought than is his."

"But, Professor," answered Ernestine, and a malicious smile played about her lips, "you have heard that this does not depend on *absolute*, but on *relative* weight. If it were not so, the biggest and burliest man would also be the cleverest; and you, Sir, as being the smallest man present, would have the smallest mind of any."

Again there ensued an awkward pause. Several had difficulty in restraining their laughter when they saw the anger that blazed in the little man's face. The scene was painful to others. Such an incident was unknown in the annals of University gatherings. It was an unheard-of thing for a woman thus to defy the world; only those who knew Ernestine could understand her feelings and make allowance for her; to the majority, her behaviour was repellant and inexplicable—and among these was Madam Möllner, to whom every daring assertion of the young lady was like vinegar on a wound.

Her old fate pursued her. Here, also, where she would have been glad to conciliate, she had scared people from her. Whether she would or no, her exceptionality isolated her from the world. No one shared her interests. She had nothing in common with anyone. She was, and remained, solitary,—alone. Even Johannes did not speak, he was buried in his thoughts. She timidly sought his eye, but could not catch it.

Elsa was still playing her part of Ophelia without a public, and thinking how happy *she* would be to be the humble hand-maid of a certain person, if he would only give her the chance. Oh, no one could imagine how devotedly she would serve him. And she lightly hummed Ophelia's words,—

“Larded with sweet flowers ;
Which bewept to the grave did not go,
With true-love showers.”

Frau Taun looked thoughtfully across at Ernestine. She began to fit the idea of Ernestine she had formed from popular report to the beautiful picture before her. This von Hartwich was indeed an impracticable person for common life! With such an unsociable temper, how could she ever manage an evening party? What sort of conversation would she encourage at table? Would she be able to gather guests about her to discuss anatomy at a *soirée*?

Herbert noticed this breach in the kindly interest felt at first for Ernestine, and he hastened to widen it. “She has not a knowledge of the ordinary courtesies of society.”

The other ladies nodded their agreement.

Thank goodness, this paragon of beauty and learning did not possess an atom of that which they plumed themselves they were eminently endowed with. So little of this had she, that she had succeeded in alienating from her the gentlemen who had at first shewn such a lively interest and inclination towards her.

One lady nudged another. “Look! she has her elbows on the table.”

“How unmannerly!”

“See, dear Fräulein, how you have succeeded in a few

minutes in setting everybody against you," said old Heim. "From your point of view you were quite right; but this is not the way to burst into a house in which you wish to be received with welcome. Those who want to associate with men must not stamp on their corns."

"I do not want to associate with them," said Ernestine.

"But you *must*. Do you think you will need no help, no support; that you can do everything for yourself alone? How unpractical, how utterly unreasonable!"

"I do not understand you, father Heim."

"That I can well believe."

Angelica interrupted the conversation by offering Ernestine a dish of cream that was highly commended.

"You must taste this, Fräulein. I made it myself, and am very proud of my handiwork."

"You must not forget that Fräulein von Hartwich holds the noble science of cooking very cheap," said Maurice, jestingly; "so you should not boast of it before her."

Angelica looked compassionately at Ernestine's distress caused by these words; and whilst the ladies entered into a general discussion of the preparation of apricot-cream, she said, affectionately, "You are quite right in scolding us women for making much of such matters; but it is a part of our business, and cannot well be neglected. God has given us sense of taste, and so there cannot be much harm in taking pleasure in preparing things that will gratify it. It is so natural for us to do all we can to please those we love, even by gratifying their inferior appetites of eating and drinking."

"Excuse my asking the question," said Ernestine, "but could you not provide the same pleasure by the hands of your cook, and devote your time and attention to something better?"

"Yes," said Angelica, amidst general merriment, "if we were well enough off to pay eighty gulden for a cook. But, as we are not, I must go to the kitchen-stove myself, or fare badly. But when one has a dear, good husband returning, poor fellow, hungry from his hard day's labour, it is impossible to let him sit down to a cold dinner. And, I can

assure you, when I see my dear Maurice pleased with the food that I have cooked for him, the pleasure is almost equal to that of nursing a child."

Ernestine stared at her. These ideas were quite beyond her horizon.

Angelica rested her head on the shoulder of her husband. "However, we are not by any means slaves. Work for love does not abase; nor is there enslavement in loving obedience. We must follow somebody or other; why not the man who protects us and works for us?" She took hold of Maurice's hand, and, unobserved, imprinted a kiss on it.

"When we have learned to work for ourselves," said Ernestine, "then we shall not want another to work for us; and we shall be indebted to no one, and be dependent on no one."

"Oh!" exclaimed Angelica, and a charming smile brightened her face, whilst her child-like eyes sought Maurice mischievously. "Nevertheless, we shall not be able to do without the stern Lords of Creation. I, at all events, could not live without my Maurice, however rich and clever I were."

Angelica's expression of her opinion met with general approval. It was as though a gush of fresh air had passed through the close atmosphere of a sick-room. All breathed freely. Angelica's straightforward naturalness did all good, after the gloomy, distorted views of Ernestine.

"Do you think to bring this goose to a right mind?" asked Maurice of Johannes, in a whisper.

"Yes," answered the latter, curtly.

"Well, I wish you joy of your undertaking. I should be sorry to have to win a wife by such means."

The supper came to an end. The hostess rose. The party adjourned to the next room, where a bowl of punch was steaming.

Johannes silently led Ernestine in. The duties of a host obliged him to leave her side. She stood alone in the middle of the room, and looked round in vain for some one to whom she could address herself. But no one went near her. The

ladies put their heads together, and whispered with their eyes on her. The gentlemen stood by themselves in groups, with their backs turned to her, or observing her through their spectacles. She stood alone, as on the stage before an unsympathetic, unapproving public.

She did not know what to do with herself. To fly into a corner would be cowardly and unworthy of her; and yet she could bear the cross-fire of the keen glances as ill now as before, when, years ago, she was subjected to the same at Madam Möllner's. How did intellect and learning help her now? She was avoided, misunderstood, despised by educated people as well as by peasants. What fate hung over her head, blighting her? Who could unravel the riddle?

But her torment was put an end to unexpectedly. Elsa hovered up, led by Möllner.

"Fräulein Herbert has asked me to introduce her," he said.

Ernestine looked with curiosity on the quaint, flower-adorned old child, and accepted with hesitation the damp, sinewy hand that was offered.

"I asked my—our friend—" she looked round, but Möllner was already with other guests, "to make us acquainted with one another, as I feel drawn to you by such a mysterious sympathy. What you said about the brain has quite excited me; for you must know that I am fanatically enthusiastic on natural science, and am half a savant myself. Phrenology is my line. I am a disciple of Schewe, whose remarkable diagnosis of my qualities converted me to the doctrines of Gall. How delightful it will be for us to discuss this matter together, as you seem to be so thoroughly up in brain. I am sure we shall understand one another. But you must, positively, let me examine your head—your most remarkable head for a woman. What a field for exploration it will offer to me. Come, sit down!"

Ernestine made an impatient gesture of refusal.

"What! won't you let me? Don't be afraid that I will be such an *enfant terrible* as to publish what I find in it. I am no tell-tale."

"I am not afraid of that," said Ernestine, bluffly. "If

you were able to read my character by my skull, you should be welcome to announce the results to whom you liked ; I have nothing to fear from such a publication. But I will not submit to be made game of."

"Made game of!" echoed Elsa, and wrung her hard hands. "Then don't you believe in Gall's doctrine?"

"Believe! what is to believe?" asked Ernestine. "I believe in nothing which cannot be demonstrated, and when anything is demonstrated then I do not *believe* any further, I *know* it. The doctrine of Gall is like that of Lavater on physiognomy, an hypothesis founded on a few coincidences, attractive to the dilettante, but utterly without charms for the earnest student."

"You cut me to the heart," lamented Elsa, at seeing the scientific nimbus with which she had invested her head, thus contemptuously plucked from it, and cast down, like a theatrical piece of tinsel. She was deeply hurt. She had meant so well—to overcome her prepossessions, and for Möllner's sake to make friends with Ernestine. She had hoped to shew him how unselfish she was, and how her wounded heart drew without envy towards her rival. She had been so glad not to come before this learned woman with empty hands ; for what she had heard of the conversation at table fitted on well enough with the doctrines of Gall, which she had been studying of late, in hopes of being allowed to thrust her bony fingers through Johannes' thick hair, under the excuse of examining his skull. And now, when she had hoped to win the favour of the beloved of her beloved by means of this, her only scientific acquirement, she had failed, and her self-denying pleasure was broken. What a hard, frightful woman this Ernestine was!

When Elsa had gone up to Ernestine, the gentlemen nudged one another. "Just look at Elsa and that Hartwich girl together. What a joke. We must hear the fun."

Consequently a circle had formed round the pair. Presently Maurice, who always had his wife on his arm, much as a child carries its doll about with it, could not withhold from putting in his word, for he was a man who dearly loved a little mischief, and he hunted after a joke as a boy pursues

a butterfly. "Come, Fräulein Elsa, tell us what Schewe made out of your head."

"What?" Elsa blushed modestly. She exercised—or thought she did—an irresistible attraction on the gentlemen, for here they were round her again. "What? why, humility forbids my telling you."

"Was he very gallant in his estimate?"

"Very much so."

"That is why you found the diagnosis so satisfactory!" said Maurice, laughing, and the laugh was joined in by the rest.

Elsa was perplexed.

"This is what makes the fellow so infallible," said Maurice; "he flatters everybody, and consequently everybody believes him."

"Oh, you are unjust!" exclaimed Elsa. "He is thoroughly in earnest with his science. He can be quite uncomplimentary too. He would be so with you, Professor Kern, to a certainty."

The gentlemen burst out laughing. "Fräulein Elsa is cross."

"I do admire this man so!" said the tormented little creature; "he is such a miracle of sensitiveness at his finger's ends. He not only feels—he thinks and sees with them. When he had examined my bumps, he stood aside and with closed eyes recapitulated what he had read in my head, and, I assure you, it was as though he held my soul in his hands like a bird taken from its nest."

"Did he keep it?"

"Oh, no! he gave it me back again, but renovated, for he had taught me to understand it."

"Well, if you have been initiated into his science, Fräulein Elsa, do show us how you exercise it. Here are plenty of nests from which to take young owls; we should like very much to have a look at our souls."

"I wanted to examine Fräulein von Hartwich's head, but she would not suffer it."

"O, but we are all ready," exclaimed Maurice, and the gentlemen bowed and held out their heads to Elsa.

"Do let her alone," said Angelica to her husband.

"O no, dear Angelica," said Elsa, who was determined to do her utmost that evening to make herself agreeable, "I am not afraid of having my skill put to the test. But the matter must not be treated as a joke. The gentlemen must disguise themselves, so that I may not be able to recognize them."

"Yes, yes, so it shall be. That will be glorious fun," exclaimed the gentlemen, made frolicsome by the punch they had drunk.

"Fräulein Elsa must leave the room till we are masked."

"I will go into the garden, it is pleasanter to see the elves sip the dew, than to see you, gentlemen, imbibe your punch. Call me when I am to come; then, as a bee flies into the chalice of a flower, I will penetrate into your heads and discover which contain honey and which harbour worm-wood."

With this roguish threat she was about to retire, when Ernestine compassionately caught her hand, and whispered into her ear. "Do not attempt this; you will only make yourself an object of ridicule."

Elsa withdrew her hand, deeply offended, and answered, "To you, perhaps, but to you only." Tears rose into her little eyes, and she heard nothing more as she went out, but Herbert's remonstrance, "You will regret this."

She went down into the garden, to the elves and nixes, to pour out to them her hidden sorrow. Alas! she was obliged to cover with a smile the torture of her breast, that none might see what she had dared to dream and hope. Was it possible that her true heart should abandon hope altogether? Was it not possible that notwithstanding all that had taken place, her patient waiting might be crowned eventually? She came to the table where Angelica had forgotten the flowers she had given her for Johannes. The glass was upset, the water had flowed away, and the bunch lay scattered about and faded. This pained her for it was a bad omen. She took up her darlings and pressed them to her heart. "It may be so with me after all. I may wither away forgotten and despised, and the greatest love that can

be shewn me will be to lay with tender hand a wreath of wild meadow flowers on my coffin." She sat down on the turf and sang to herself, as the dew gently fell over the flowers. "Alas ! tears will not bring forth May blossoms, and make dead love bloom again."

"Fräulein Elsa, you are crying !"

She recoiled, and then sprang up. Möllner came towards her over the soft turf.

"No, not tears, evening dew," she lisped, and dried her eyes.

Möllner looked at her with pity. "Poor creature," he thought, "how can you help it that Nature has dealt so hardly by you, and that your brother's perverse training has made you ridiculous, so that you do not obtain the compassion which is your due."

He held out his arm to her. "Come along, dear Elsa," he said, good-naturedly, "I have been sent to fetch you. You may thank Fräulein von Hartwich that you are spared the mystification which was intended for you."

"How so?" asked Elsa, stayed upon Möllner's arm, and feeling like a creeper clinging to its legitimate support.

"Ernestine was asked to change clothes with Fräulein Taun, who has got hair of the same colour, and then both were to be masked, so as to deceive you. The young men were very urgent, and I could not prevent it. But Fräulein von Hartwich, convinced that you were not so sure of your science as not to be taken in, refused with determination, and the company has broken up in ill-temper."

Elsa said nothing. She was somewhat cast down. She certainly was not prepared to stand such a test as this. She had hoped to recognise the different persons by their hair, and frame her judgment accordingly. But it had not occurred to her that the girl Taun and Ernestine had hair much alike. And yet, however glad she might feel at escaping a blunder, it vexed her to think that her escape was due to the generosity of her rival.

"Some other time in private you will show us your skill, will you not?" said Möllner, consoling her as he might a child.

"Yes, if *you* wish it, and if you will allow me to try it on your massive head."

Her voice trembled with excitement as she made this daring proposal.

"Why not?" said Möllner. "If you think my thick skull a good subject, you are heartily welcome to experimentalize on it."

"Your thick skull? Oh, how can you speak thus? When I shall touch that head, it will be with fear and trembling, lest Minerva should burst from it to strike me to powder for my audacity!"

Johannes smiled compassionately. "You cannot refrain from putting me into embarrassment by your exaggerated compliments. You know I am too simple to be able to answer them in like strain."

"How can you think of answering me? To allow me to honour you is all I ask. What does the brooklet ask of the forest tree whose roots drink of its waters? Leave my admiration meandering about your feet, and draw from it for your mighty existence as much as you wish and need. There is ever sufficient for you there—the brooklet is inexhaustible."

Johannes was disconcerted by this gush of sentiment. What could he answer without either raising illusory hopes or deeply wounding this unfortunate creature?

The voice of her brother relieved him in his perplexity. They had then reached the steps.

"They are coming at last," said Herbert to the company, who were waiting to say good-bye. Möllner and Elsa mounted the steps, and she took her hat and shawl from the stand in the hall.

"What have you been doing all this while?" asked Herbert, purposely aloud.

"Why, goodness! we flew through the garden!" exclaimed Elsa.

"Have you got wings, Fräulein?" asked the private tutor.

"Yes!" answered Elsa, with a look of rapture at Johannes, "they have burst their sheath."

"Then pray fly along before us," said the indomitable joker, as he lighted his cigar at the lamp in the hall. "That will be charming, indeed!"

"Come along, dear Elsa; let us go," said Angelica. "It won't do to fence with gentlemen. Now say good-bye to my mother, and come with us; our way is the same."

Elsa did as bidden. Behind Madam Möllner, in the door, stood Ernestine, greatly cast down. Elsa approached her, and said,—

"May you have a good night, if shy Morpheus dares to venture near your armed genius."

Ernestine bowed without speaking.

Herbert drew Elsa away. "Compliment as much as you like, I will have my revenge on her. She shall see the 'little man' become terribly great as her enemy."

"Good night, mother, dear! good night, poor Ernestine!" said Angelica, and she had scarce time to kiss them both before her impatient husband caught her up, and, with his lighted cigar in his mouth, carried her down the steps.

"Good night, Professor Möllner!" sighed Elsa. "The brooklet goes its way to the ocean of oblivion."

"Good night! good night!" was heard in various tones; and Father Heim struck up in his rough bass an old student song, with which the others chimed in, for—with the exception of the "disturbance made by that crack-brained Hartwich"—the evening had been a merry one, and Möllner's Havanas smoked well on the way home in the fresh night air.

If that Hartwich girl had not spoiled the joke with Elsa, they would have had rare fun. Elsa was more in favour than usual. She was a fool; but, after all, one who afforded them great amusement and many a laugh. The solemn Hartwich damsel was not one to get a laugh out of. She was so provokingly clever, and knew how to defend her follies with such grim fury, that there was no fun to be found in stirring her up. Thus—chattering, singing, laughing—the swarm left the house, and dispersed in the still, starry night.

Madam Möllner had returned to the drawing-room.

Johannes, who had stayed to lock the door after the retreating guests, came in, and taking a chair near Ernestine, said, "Come, mother, sit down, and get a little nearer acquainted with our Ernestine, before she retires for the night."

But Madam Möllner took her key-basket in her hand. "I am very sorry, but I must give out the linen for the Fräulein's bed. The servants are busied with clearing away."

"Oh, mother, let Regina do that, and stay with us," begged Johannes, with a light tone of reproach; "the tables may remain as they are till to-morrow."

"That cannot be, on account of the silver. Besides, the Fräulein is tired, and will want to go to rest."

"I am very grieved to have to inconvenience you," said Ernestine, painfully agitated.

"Not at all. I am pleased." With these cold words the lady left the room.

Ernestine sat there, pale and exhausted.

Johannes took her hand. "Have patience, have patience, my Ernestine! You will come to know and value each other."

Ernestine shook her head without speaking. Clouds lay on her brow. "This also is no home for me!"

"Not yet; but it may become one."

"No—never!"

Johannes bit his lips. "Ernestine, you little know what pain you give me!"

"You, my friend! Give pain to you, the only one who has shewn me kindness! Oh, no! I will not do that! No, no! On no account!"

She bowed to him with deep, almost child-like confidence, and laid her hand on his.

"When you are like this," said Johannes, contemplating her with burning love, "I cannot but ask, 'Can this be the same Ernestine who is ready to sacrifice her precious, inexhaustible, unfathomable heart and all its joys to a phantom—to striving after what will not outweigh a thousandth part of the happiness which she might diffuse over herself and others?' O my God!" He pressed his eyes on

Ernestine's hand ; they were wet with tears. "Every word you spoke this evening was a stab to my heart. Could you think and speak thus after that hour when we were together? Oh, you lovely white rose! You bowed to me that I might pluck you, and when I put forth my hand, you tear me with your thorns!"

Ernestine laid her disengaged hand on his bent brow. "Johannes—dear, unutterably dear friend!—have consideration for me! Try to enter into my soul! From earliest childhood—at a time when most are rocked in the arms of love, are laid to sleep in the lap of love—I was trampled on, kicked about, almost tortured to death, because—I was a girl! Every anguish-cry of my breast, every thought of my soul, every feeling of my young heart was gathered into this one question: 'Why—why!—must I thus expiate what is no fault of mine—that I am not a boy!' And in every wound which was dealt me, the seed of revenge was strewn—the seed of revenge for my own wrongs and those of my sex—the seed of ambition to do all that can be achieved by that sex whose superiority was so insultingly, so brutally paraded before me. It ripened quickly in the glow of indignation I felt at the injustice my sex is forced to endure, the difficulties which were opposed to its endeavours to rise above vulgar routine. It grew with me; it became mighty; it ramified through my whole mental life, like the veins and nerves of my body. Can you tear them out and expect me to live?"

Johannes held her hand in his own, and listened thoughtfully.

"It is," pursued Ernestine, "as if my heart were frozen at the moment when it cried to Heaven, in its acutest agony, 'Why am I of less value than a boy?' It is as though this question were marked in it like a petrification in marble, and will not out though the stone be shattered. I have had no wish, no thought, but to wring out from heaven or earth the answer to that question: '*Why*—why are we subservient to man? Why must we depend on his generosity, and be miserable when it fails? Is it because he is the strongest?' The days when Might made Right are over. Everything

turns on the question, 'Has this prejudice, stretching back to pre-historic times, prevented woman from the legitimate development of her powers, or is her subordination due to some physical impediment?' I shall never find rest till I have solved this question scientifically!"

"Do you not suppose, Ernestine, that there may be a *third* power, which may subordinate the weaker sex to the stronger—a power higher than that of Might, more constraining than that of Intellect—the power of Love?"

Ernestine looked at him steadily. "I cannot believe that Love will do what Reason will not allow."

"Indeed!" Johannes did not speak for a moment. He paced up and down the room with folded arms. At last he stood before her. "You speak of a feeling you know nothing about. But, though you have this day destroyed many budding hopes in me, there is one you shall not take from me, and that is the hope that some day you will know what this feeling is."

Madam Möllner came in. "Young lady, your room is ready. Would you do me the favour of following me?"

"Mother," exclaimed Johannes, "do not be so stiff and cold towards Ernestine. One who stands so near to me should not be kept at a distance by you."

"I was not aware that I had been lacking in politeness to Fräulein von Hartwich. You forget that we are still absolutely strangers to one another."

"You are right, Madame," said Ernestine. "I am not so presuming as to expect of you what you would not accord to the greatest stranger. I regret that I am forced to accept anything from you. I will follow you to my room, so as not to keep you longer from your rest; but be well assured that I only ask the shelter of the house for one night."

She turned to Johannes, and held out her hand to him, with an indescribable look in her large dark eyes. "Sleep soundly, *my good Sir!*"

"God bless your first sleep under my roof!" said Johannes, with emotion. It was as though this wish assumed the luminous form of her long-lost guardian angel, and glided before her up the stairs to the cheerful chamber to

which the mother led her—as though it stood at the head of the snowy couch, and fanned her burning brow with gentle pinions.

“Mother!” said Johannes, gravely, when Madam Möllner came down again. “To-day, for the first time in my life, you have *not* been my mother.”

CHAPTER IV.

IRRECONCILABLE ANTAGONISM.

THE morning poured its gold through the white muslin curtains which veiled Ernestine's window, without waking her. She slept as soundly and peacefully as a child. For the first time for many years the pressure of work did not force her prematurely from slumber, and the spectre of her uncle did not stand knocking at her door. The guardian angel Johannes had given her ward it off. He kept faithful watch still by her head, and it was as if the whole house felt his sanctifying presence, for all was hushed within it as in a church. Its inmates were up, but the command of the master prevented the slamming of doors, and heavy treading in the corridors. Johannes guarded Ernestine's slumber: he knew how necessary it was to her weary spirit. However loudly his heart throbbed its morning greeting towards her, he imposed silence on it also.

The sleeper inhaled with full lungs the blessedness of the perfect peace that surrounded her—a blessedness immeasurable to a soul wearied to death.

Madame Möllner had prepared breakfast, and was sitting with her work at the window. But her hands lay with needle and thread on her lap, and her eyes still red from weeping looked sadly into the little spirit lamp that had been burning for a full hour under the coffee-machine.

"What do you think? Had I better make fresh coffee? We are kept unconscionably long waiting!" she said to her son as he came in.

"As you think best, mother dearest," said Johannes, "you know that I do not understand these matters."

The old lady rang for the maid. "Regina, take the coffee

out and bring me in the machine again. I will prepare fresh coffee."

The servant made a face, and did what she was bid sulkily.

"Pity to spoil good coffee," she muttered, as she went out.

"It is very unpleasant, mother," observed Johannes, "that Regina should be allowed to criticise our orders. I do not like to have servants of this sort about me. If you cannot break her of this habit, mother, I shall be obliged if you will give her notice to leave."

"But she is a hard worker and thoroughly trustworthy," said Madam Möllner.

"That may be, but there are plenty to be got who are both these and amiable and mannerly into the bargain. I do not like at every moment when I am in good spirits to see sulks on the faces of my servants. I like to have those about me who fulfil their duties with cheerfulness."

"Such servants do not drop into one's lap when wanted."

"Then we must look out for them," said Johannes, and he cut the conversation short by taking up the morning paper and skimming through it.

His mother sighed, but said nothing.

Regina brought in the machine again, and said ill-temperedly, "Is the young lady not to be awaked *yet*?"

"No!" was Johannes' curt answer.

"Then I shall have to be washing up breakfast things when I ought to be cooking dinner," muttered she, and shut the door with a bang behind her.

"Now mother—I have had enough of this. It is not for me to trouble myself about the maids, but I know which suit me and which do not. Either Regina mends her manners or she goes."

"You have become all at once very inconsiderate towards the girl," said his mother bitterly. "Do you expect to find implicit obedience everywhere?"

"I know what you are hinting at, mother, but I am not hit. I ask of everyone only what each is quite capable of doing. Of a maid whom I pay I expect obedience,—from a woman of my own position, love."

"Love will not achieve wonders."

"True love will."

"Something more than love is wanted, self-sacrifice."

"In true love lies everything, self-sacrifice, resignation—the surrender of the entire self."

"Everyone cannot love truly. Be on your guard lest you should be deceived intentionally or unintentionally."

"Set your mind at rest, mother, and spare me the expression of your doubts," said Johannes with unusual severity, and he buried himself in his paper, whilst his ear was open to catch the least sound outside the door.

His mother brought a little coffee mill out of a cupboard in the wall, and began to grind fresh berries. The clock struck nine.

"One can see that the young lady is not accustomed to orderly housekeeping, let alone good manners," said the old lady, unable to restrain her vexation.

"All I can see is that, after the excitement of yesterday, she has needed sleep."

"People do not sleep so late who are accustomed to keep proper hours."

"Night work interferes with the keeping of what you call proper hours."

"A bad habit for a housekeeper."

"Mother!" exclaimed Johannes, "if I did not know your good heart you would put me out."

"Indeed?" The old lady shook out the coffee-grounds. Her hands trembled in doing so. "This girl has upset everything already. Since she has been in the house everything has gone wrong. To-day you are put out with me; yesterday I was no more your mother. And yet, my son, never have I felt so truly your mother—no, not in the hour when I bore you with pain—as now in my deep anxiety for your welfare." She could say no more: emotion unmanned her.

"My own mother," cried Johannes, and he tenderly embraced the old lady, "do not weep at a hasty word from me. Come, be calm, I am in such good spirits to-day. Run along, mother dear, and get the rod out of pickle for your naughty boy."

The mother was forced to smile; she stroked the shining hair of that man so deserving of her love.

"God bless you, my dear, good son. It is only my love which grudges you any but the best and noblest of women, and makes me dread lest you, a man without a fellow, should throw yourself away on a woman who is not worthy of you."

"Trust me, mother, I understand your heart, and thank you for its solicitude; but if you really wish to see me happy, love me a little less, and Ernestine a little more. This is all I ask of you: will you grant it me?"

"I cannot do the first; I will try to do the second, as you wish it, my son."

"That is right, mother," exclaimed Johannes, and kissed her still beautiful hands. "And now I will sanction your waking our guest; I should like to see her before I go to college."

"Here she comes," said his mother, and she stepped to meet Ernestine. "Good morning, my dear Fräulein, how have you slept?" And she bent Ernestine's head towards her, and kissed her on the brow.

Ernestine looked at her with surprise and gratitude. "I slept as if rocked by angels. For a long time I have not felt as refreshed and restored as to-day." She held out a bunch of white roses towards Johannes, and asked, "Did you put the beautiful roses before my door?"

Johannes coloured faintly, and answered, looking at her with admiration, "Yes, I laid them there."

"I thank you," said Ernestine, "never was anyone as kind to me as you are. There are many flowers in my garden, but none have given me the pleasure that these have. I have never in my life before been given a flower; now I know what good it does one to get such a present."

"Did your uncle not give you a bouquet on your birthday?" asked Madam Möllner.

"Oh dear, no," answered Ernestine with openness, "and I do not think it would have given me the same pleasure to have received one from him."

Johannes' face beamed. "When is your birthday,

Ernestine?" he asked, as his mother helped her to breakfast.

Ernestine set down her cup, which she was on the point of putting to her lips, and looked at him with surprise, "I do not know."

"You do not know!" echoed Johannes.

"I will ask my uncle. I believe he told me once, but I have forgotten."

Madam Möllner clasped her hands. "Forget your own birthday? Is that possible! Was it not kept in any way?"

"Kept?" echoed Ernestine, with surprise. "No. Why should it have been?"

"Do you mean to say that you do not know this loving custom?"

Ernestine shook her head almost sadly. "I know no loving customs at all."

The old lady looked at her with compassion. "Then you hardly know how old you are?"

"Not exactly. But my father died when I was ten. Shortly before his death he rebuked me for being too small and weak for any one to suppose I were a girl of ten. Since then twelve years have elapsed."

"Poor child," said Madam Möllner, "this explains much."

"Does it not, mother?" Johannes nodded to her across the table.

"And your uncle has interdicted you many of the pleasures of life," pursued the old lady.

"Some, no doubt, but I will not be ungrateful; he has given me others in their place, and they not less noble and beautiful."

"What are they?"

"He has taught me to think and work. There are no greater and purer joys than these."

The brow of the hostess clouded over again. Johannes noticed it, and changed the conversation.

"Ernestine, you ought not to drink your coffee without milk. It excites the nerves."

"My uncle told me to do so in order to stimulate my

mind. Without a cup of black coffee in the morning I should often not be fit for work."

"That is quite in harmony with your uncle's system of training you. First, he overstrains you by watching and night-work, and then he forces you by stimulants to unnatural activity when your constitution demands repose. You are sure before long to discover that you are wearing yourself out, physically and mentally, by this manner of life, by this over-exhaustion and then over-exerting of the nervous system. I hardly know what I can think of your uncle's conscience in *this* matter, also, my dear Ernestine."

Ernestine looked down, startled. She felt the truth of what Johannes said.

"But, Johannes," said his mother, "you rather forget etiquette, in calling Fräulein von Hartwich by her christian name, when she does not address you in the same familiar terms."

"It is her wish."

"Yes, I begged him to do so. It seems to me so home-like when he speaks to me without formality, as if I were a child still. It seems to me then as if I had dropped back into childhood, and was about to start life afresh."

"Then you ought to call him by his christian name also. This familiarity should not be all on one side."

Ernestine coloured. "Excuse me now. It may come, perhaps,—later."

"Leave this matter to time and Ernestine's own feelings, dear mother. I shall not ask it, and be quite content that it should come when she wills. And she will do it when she wishes to give me a great pleasure." Johannes rose, and held out his hand to her. "Farewell, Ernestine. I have a lecture at ten. When that is over I will return."

Ernestine looked at him with swimming eyes, and said almost inaudibly. "Farewell, my friend."

Johannes pressed her hand with heartfelt joy, "I thank you." Then, turning to his mother, "Dear mother, I leave Ernestine with you for an hour, and hope from the bottom of my heart that you will learn to understand one another. At all events remember what you promised."

"You may rely on me, my son."

He went to the door, hesitated, and then called his mother to him. She came, and he whispered entreatingly, "Be kind to her; what you do to her, you do to me."

He cast one last longing glance at Ernestine, as he went out, and then closed the door behind him. It was hard for him to tear himself away. He felt afraid to go, lest Ernestine should escape when his arm was not there to protect and restrain her. He would gladly have gone back, but duty called him on. "O! if I may find her there when I come home again!" he said, and next moment rebuked himself for this childish anxiety.

He loved her so dearly. The hour, the one hour of lecture, seemed to him an eternity. He had scarcely overstepped the threshold before he was counting the minutes till his return.

How beautiful she was to-day after her reinvigorating sleep, so maidenly, so—almost bride-like! Oh! if, when he came back, she met him with that melting look, he would contain himself no longer, but cast himself at her feet and ask her to become his. The momentous word must be spoken. He must see his way clear. Doubt, such as that produced by the contrast between Ernestine's cold, hard opinions, and her affectionate behaviour towards himself, was unendurable. One hour only separated him from certainty. "Oh, were it over!"

"Are you fond of beans?" asked Madam Möllner of Ernestine.

"Why do you ask me this?"

"Because we are going to have some for dinner."

"Thank you, but I must not stay to dine with you."

"Why not?"

"My uncle might return unexpectedly, and be angry with me if I were not at home."

"It is strange to me that you who strive so persistently for freedom should allow yourself to be kept in such durance by your guardian. It looks like a contradiction."

Ernestine hesitated.

The old lady went on. "You fight for the independence

of women, and designate as slavery the obedience of a wife to him who provides her with her daily bread, and are so little able to emancipate yourself from a man who, as far as I know the circumstances, is dependent on you, not you on him, that you do not dare to remain away from home for a day without his permission."

Ernestine was staggered. "You are right. But I have been brought up under this restraint. It has become so much of a habit with me that I am unconscious of it. Moreover, my uncle has never opposed my wishes in such a manner as to make me desire to shake him off."

"Let me ask you, dear Fräulein, is this dull unconscious habit nobler than the free loving obedience which a wife imposes on herself towards a trusted husband?"

Ernestine kept silence for a while, and then answered with her generous candour. "No, it is not. But I did not impose this obligation on myself, and I cannot escape from it as long as my uncle, as my guardian, has legal authority over me."

"But legal right in a guardian does not extend to the restraint of personal freedom; he cannot forbid your doing what is against no law."

"He tells me that the guardian is supreme over his ward. And if this intolerable tyranny did not extend over male equally with female wards, I should have written against it long ago."

"That would not have helped to right matters, much," said the old lady, coldly.

Ernestine shrugged her shoulders. "That is no doubt true of each of my writings. But I do not expect more of them than that they should be some of the waterdrops that hollow out a stone which blocks the current of sound reason."

"We will not lose ourselves in abstractions," said the old lady, desirous of avoiding debatable ground. "I want to persuade you to stay the day with us."

"I would do so gladly if I were not afraid of being burdensome to you."

"Certainly not to me, and to my son you would give great pleasure, which, perhaps will outweigh the annoyance your

absence might cause your uncle. But—you know best what you ought to do."

Ernestine laid her hand in that of the hostess. "I will remain."

"That is well. Johannes would never have forgiven me if you had not." She rang the bell. Regina appeared, and took away the breakfast things.

"You may bring me the beans, I will prepare them," said the mistress. Regina brought in a great bowl of haricots, and a cloth to receive the stalks.

"You will excuse me," said Madam Möllner; and she seated herself at the table in the window, took out her pen-knife, and made ready for beginning work.

Ernestine looked at her with amazement. "Do you shell the beans yourself?"

"Why not? The girl has a great deal to do this morning, and so I am glad to relieve her of this long and not very hard job."

"I would help you if I knew how."

"Try your hand, it is not difficult. There is no magic in it." The old lady, pleased at this domestic turn in Ernestine's mood, brought another knife, and gave it her along with a pod. "Look here, you first cut off the stalk, and then pull out the fibres. So! It is customary hereabouts not to draw the threads quite out, but to cut them off short, but I do not approve of the plan, it always leaves a toughness in the pod. So! Now cut the bean down lengthways—stay, not like that, rather finer. No! not the stalks into the bowl, but down on the cloth. There, you see, that in time everything in the world can be acquired. Even without the prospect of being obliged to do this sort of work it is well to know how to set about it, for then, whatever happens, we are not at a loss." A gentle sigh escaped her bosom. She remembered in what good circumstances she had once been, when there was no need for her to soil her fingers with kitchen stuff—but her fortune had been lost in her brother's unfortunate speculation.

Ernestine observed with smiling astonishment the energy with which the old lady sought to initiate her into this bit

of domestic drudgery. She asked herself seriously, had this woman intelligence? A scrutinizing glance at the high thoughtful brow, and into the clear expressive eyes of the speaker, convinced her that the old lady was a woman of no ordinary abilities.

Buried in these reflections, she mechanically continued her work; but Madam Möllner discovered with dismay that Ernestine was flinging the refuse among the beans, and the trimmed pods on the floor.

"My dear Fräulein!" she exclaimed, "just look what you have been about! I must empty the whole basin and sort out the stalks."

Ernestine threw down the knife, and leaned back in her chair. "It is of no use; I am not accustomed to this sort of work. Let each stick to his own. Excuse me; but I really do not think it worth your while trying to teach me this accomplishment. It is not the least likely that I shall ever be in a situation where it might prove useful."

"As you choose," said the lady of the house, coldly.

"Do not scold me. Is it possible that you are put out by my not being able to shell beans?" She caught the busy hand of the old lady. "Dear Madam, have consideration for me. You must not exact of anyone that for which she is incompetent. Do you ask a fish to fly, or a bird to swim? You do not. So do not demand of me, who live only in an abstract world, to feel interest for the materialism of common life."

"I might quote 'They strive about beans when crowns are at stake,'" said Madam Möllner. "And yet these things, in our circumstances, stand in relation to each other. Matters of highest importance issue from trifles. These little domestic preparations for a meal, however common and small they may be, are part and parcel of the duties of our female vocation. They are the little meshes of a great web. Let one drop, and the net falls into holes and comes to pieces."

Ernestine shrugged her shoulders. "You are right from the point of view in which you see things; but your standing-point is not mine. I look for woman's vocation on a higher

platform. A noble intellect ought not to allow itself to be dragged down to worry itself about—excuse me saying this—more or less vulgar trifles.” The old lady frowned; but she let Ernestine speak out what she had to say. “It is a pity,” continued the latter, “that so much of the animal still adheres to us that we are forced to eat and drink, so as to keep the machine in working order; that we have not attained a higher stage in the development of the species. We should take a pride in endeavouring to push on the evolution of what is noble in us by struggling against all the animal cravings that linger in us, not by encouraging them by making their satisfaction a matter of careful study. We ought to be ashamed of our fragile, exacting bodily nature; not exalt it to an idol, and boast that the highest office woman can fill is that of priestess ministering to its wants.”

“This is all plausible enough,” said the old lady; “but, nevertheless, it is utterly wrong. The Creator has endowed us with the powers of enjoyment and the right to enjoy; all we have to see to is that enjoyment be seemly and refined. It is a false shame to seek to ignore that which we cannot possibly do without; and in you, a natural philosopher, it is a contradiction. Before whom should you blush? Before your fellow man? Certainly not; for he shares your earthly weaknesses. And for you, who believe in no God, where is your ideal, ethereal, incorporeal, unchangeable spirit, subject to no necessities, before whom you will cast down your eyes in shame that you are human?”

“In *myself*; in my own ideas.”

“Yes, that is your *façon de parler*, which has no tangible reality. Because you have no God, and yet feel a need of Him, you deify yourself; and it humbles you to find that this God of your own setting up has such sordid requirements.”

“I beg your pardon. Such insensate pride is far from me. No; this idealism is, if I may so speak, a chastity of the soul, which recoils before the coarse demands of matter. And I feel as if I should be doing dishonour to this, my ideal, were I to sacrifice the time and energy

I require for mental activity in dallying with these ignoble suitors."

"You speak as though you thought the obligations of a housewife required her to devote herself to the refinements of materialism. But I understand by these obligations something different from a mere caring about eating and drinking. Order, cleanliness are, for instance, requirements of life, and are those which are most necessary to æsthetic natures; for they are part of Beauty. However many servants a housewife may have, these are matters demanding her personal and constant supervision. To be sure there are women who make such a fuss with mop and pail, that one can only suppose them to be ever hunting after dirt because they love it. But these are extreme cases, of which I will not speak. The guidance of those subject to you, the division of labour, the preservation of your property—be it only the silver, linen, and furniture, the making and mending of clothes, and, lastly, the care of children,—all these are necessities which no woman can avoid, not even the wealthiest, and which she has no right to trouble her husband with. I consider it one of our most sacred duties to relieve man of his material cares in order that he may with free mind throw himself into the battle for the ideal welfare of mankind. We are helping in this, in our humble way; we share in his greatest achievements by keeping up his powers for work in full vigour, free from distraction."

"I tell you plainly that I am not capable of playing such a modest *rôle*. I can find no pleasure in a pursuit which any common housekeeper could follow with equal success. I feel that I have got the power in me to help mankind in its intellectual efforts directly; not mediately, through the frying-pan and the darning-needle. Why, then, should I squander my powers in an activity which is not to my taste, and which pretty nearly any woman you might pick up in a village is capable of taking off my hands and executing better than I?"

"You undervalue these capabilities because you do not know them. When these domestic duties are carried out in

a right spirit, and with right intent, they are ennobled, and are of great importance. For the more accomplished and intellectual a woman is, the more clearly will she see the grandeur of the task at which her husband is working, and the greater the necessity laid on her to lighten it by her tender cares for his bodily and spiritual welfare. With this object before the eyes, the commonest occupation becomes ideal; the most tiresome work, a deed of love. Besides, the active housewife has plenty of time for further educating herself and putting her talents to good account, so as to be able to cheer her husband's hours of relaxation. This, my dear Fräulein, is what I understand by a wife as she should be." She suddenly seized Ernestine's hand, and drew her nearer to herself. "And this—why should I not speak my mind plainly?—this is the sort of woman whom I should like to receive as my daughter."

Ernestine looked at her with astonishment. "Would like to receive as your daughter?"

The old lady hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Yes; my daughter you *might* become. You are an orphan, and I pity you. If you would become a woman as she should be, and submit to our social and Christian ways of thinking and acting, then I could indeed take you to my heart as a daughter."

Ernestine withdrew her hand. "I thank you for your good intentions. But if I am only to obtain your favour under these conditions, I shall hardly be able to acquire it."

Madame Möllner shook her head with growing dissatisfaction.

"You have misunderstood me."

"I understand you better than you understand me."

"You suppose that my home-made wisdom is quite comprehensible by you, but that your ideas are quite out of my range."

Madam Möllner put her knife among the beans, and pushed back the bowl.

"I tell you that the time may arrive in which you will think of my simple teaching, and will perhaps regret that you have thrust it from you."

"Madam, I do not thrust you from me ; but I am too honourable to seek to obtain your regard under conditions which I know it is impossible for me to fulfill. I might pretend to what I do not feel, and so obtain your goodwill, but I have ever been truthful. It is a theft to win love on false representations. What would it advantage me if I were to keep silence and cast myself on your breast, and with veiled convictions receive your caresses, knowing all the time that you did not love me, as I am, but me as I allowed you to imagine me? Sooner or later the truth would out, and you would despise me for having lent myself to a deception. No, I feel that such as I really am I am not unworthy of the love of noble souls, and if I cannot win it by truthfulness I will never seek it by fraud."

"You speak proudly ! Such self-satisfaction in a young girl before an old woman is not seemly, least of all before the mother of your best friend and benefactor."

"Madam," exclaimed Ernestine, "I shall for ever be grateful to your son for his goodness to me, but he would never consent to my showing gratitude by hypocrisy and cowardly submission."

"My Fräulein," said the old lady, with difficulty controlling herself, "you are exciting yourself unnecessarily. I am a simple straightforward woman who cannot express herself in your tongue, nor follow you in your flights. I do not want to drag you down to our level. All I sought was to shew you this earth in its real shape, that you might know what to expect if you wished to settle down on it, and be received by a pair of motherly arms, lest your fall on the ground of hard realities should stun you."

"Madam, if the earth is such as you represent it, I prefer to remain aloft in a colder but purer sphere."

"I should have supposed that a sphere which will not protect you from the stones of exasperated peasants is not one to be envied you. I, at all events, should much prefer the safer if less ambitious one of the domestic hearth. However, tastes differ."

These words hurt Ernestine. "Truth," she said, "is born in heaven and stoned on earth. Whoever seeks to bring it

down to earth must have the spirit of a martyr. These are commonplaces, which are too hackneyed to need repetition. Whoever knows what truth is must confess it, and the blessedness of knowing it outweighs the pain that its confession has entailed on me."

"Excuse me, but these are phrases which will not cover a public scandal like that of yesterday."

"Madam!" exclaimed Ernestine, reddening.

"Be easy, dear child, I am speaking to you as a mother might. What is the gain to you, if you have brought discredit on those 'Truths' which you seek to proclaim. Who will believe in the understanding and doctrine of a woman who has not had the common-sense to prevent herself from becoming ridiculous? Hear me out patiently. I am speaking the mind of one who at any moment would lay down his life for you. Let me speak out all that I feel, that there may be plain-sailing between us. The world, as now constituted, is merciless in its judgment of every attempt of a woman to step beyond her sphere, because our ideas of propriety rigidly restrain a woman within the bounds of family life, and men regard the desire of emancipation from these time-honoured and universal bounds, as an indication of want of womanly sense of honour and decency, and that it cannot be too severely chastised. Publicity is a thorny soil. The slightest step taken by a woman, with whatever caution, outside the bounds of her vocation brings her amidst nettles and briars which wound her unarmed feet, where man may walk with impunity. And suppose she should succeed in winding a wreath for her brows on this unhallowed soil, it can only be, as one of our poets has said, a crown of thorns."

Ernestine looked fixedly before her. Madam Möllner did not know what was passing in her mind. All at once the proud brow was raised. "Well, if it be but a crown of thorns, I will press it on my head. Better that than the fading roses of vulgar happiness, or the Philistine cap of the German housewife."

The old lady looked towards heaven, as praying for patience. Then she answered, after a struggle with herself,

"I quite admit to you that the position of women in general might be a more worthy one ; but it is not to be improved by opposing it, but by filling it worthily. The latter course will win respect, the former mockery such as attaches to all ineffectual attempts."

"I hope, Madam, to turn the mockery that assails us into a wholesome fear."

"Well, and what will that avail you supposing you succeed? Is it a more satisfactory feeling for a woman that she repels men, and that folks fall back out of her way, than that she should form the centre round which a swarm of happy loving beings congregate, won to her by her heart's best blood?"

"I do not live for myself—but for the millions of women whose battle I have undertaken to fight. However happy I might become by abandoning my task, I should despise myself for preferring my own welfare to that of thousands. I assure you candidly, I could not find happiness in the life which you have described as that of the ideal housewife. Whoever has once plunged into the waves of the boundless ocean of thought, which embraces this world, would die of home-sickness, imprisoned within the narrow walls of a household."

Madam Möllner rested her arms in her lap. Her patience was exhausted. "It is all in vain. The most reasonable representation will not penetrate the hard armour of prejudice in which you have encased yourself."

"The most reasonable representations, do you call them? I must confess I had formed quite another conception of representations which are to be regarded as reasonable."

"Indeed! you mean what Kant and Hegel would call by that name! You are a disciple of that so-termed 'pure reason,' which rejects everything that man holds to with love and reverence, and thinks the world might have been made better had the good God not been allowed to meddle with it. You are welcome to strew your doctrine of pure reason where you will, and with what profusion you like ; you cannot do much harm, for you will only prove the utter untenability and worthlessness of the ground on which God's

opponents stand. But decent people have no wish to receive such persons into their families. Such a spirit of negation can never awake confidence, and this distresses me for my Johannes' sake."

Ernestine was silent for a while, and then she looked sadly at her hostess. "I have not asked to be received into your family, Madam. I know that with my views I am an offence. Whoever explores and discloses the defects and blemishes of human society cannot be received as a welcome guest; such a person is avoided as the incarnation of reproach. The emancipated call me a Philistine; the Philistines treat me as a fautor of emancipation. I belong to no party; I live in opposition to all. It is a dreadful fate, and only a clear conscience would enable me to bear it."

"Or great selfishness," said the old lady, under her voice.

Ernestine coloured. With anger hardly restrained, she answered: "Madam, when a person has spent a long life in modestly giving up her opinions in deference to others, till to be void of opinion becomes a habitual frame of mind,—and this is what a woman in your relations must become, then that person naturally regards a woman who has the courage to stick to her convictions as puffed up with self-esteem."

"Oh, it is not at all necessary to be void of opinion if one hesitates about announcing one's views with a flourish of trumpets as infallible verities."

"Madam," said Ernestine, her whole body quivering, "if you possessed one drop of that motherly good-will towards me which you claimed not long ago, you would not judge me with such severity. A mother has consideration for her child. How could you offer to be to me as a mother, when you were not prepared to exercise the consideration which is a primary feature of maternal regard?"

"I really do not know how I could have allowed myself to have been so deluded. And yet I made the offer honourably from my heart. God knows I intended well by you. If you knew what a part you are playing before the world, you

would show yourself more humble and more thankful for the sacrifice; yes, however much you may be huffed at what I say, you must learn to hear the truth; for the *sacrifice*, I repeat, which a mother offers when, for the sake of her son, she throws open to you the door of her house and of her heart."

Ernestine sat pale and silent, with hands folded in her lap. She did not venture to stir.

The old lady went on in the highest excitement. "I made this sacrifice, I conquered myself and tried to overlook your atheism, your want of womanliness, and your ill-repute. I hoped, for my son's sake, that you might change, and I was ready honourably to lend a helping hand. But you rejected my first approaches in a manner which makes me tremble at the thought that my Johannes should have given his sensitive heart to one with such a steel-hardened disposition; that he should take a woman to his hearth, who treats with scorn all the sacred duties of a wife, and who would not rest till she had reduced to ruin both his house and himself."

Ernestine sprang up. She gasped for breath; her words broke forth with difficulty and fragmentarily. "Madam! I can assure you that never has one word passed between your son and me about this; that I would never have set foot within this house if I had known that I was to be treated as an outlaw. I promise you, you may set your mind at ease, I will not do you the dishonour of becoming the wife of your son. If he were to offer me his hand, I would fling it away. As I believe in no God I can take no oath to you, but I swear by my honour which I esteem above life—"

"Stop! stop!" interrupted the old lady, in deadly alarm. "My Johannes! what have I done? Ernestine, do not make matters worse than they are; do not bring them to a climax. I did not want you to abandon my son, but only your own errors and failings. Promise me amendment, and you will become a dear daughter to me."

"I *can* not promise that; I *will* not promise it. Do you think I would beg and haggle for the questionable happiness

of ruling at a hearth where I should have it thrown in my teeth on every occasion, that great sacrifices were made to put up with me ; where the only credit I could gain would have to be won with a duster and a kitchen spoon, and an over-roasted joint would brand me as a useless member of human society? No, you understand me less than I expected, if you suppose the gulf that separates us is to be bridged over thus. Spare me the shame of further explanation. I thank you for your hospitality. I leave you, as I left you twelve years ago, when wet and shivering I stood before you, and you had nothing for me but a slight, making me feel as a criminal when I was not to blame any more than I am to-day. Then I would have died rather than return to you, though your son—may he be blessed—would have treated me as a sister. After a lapse of twelve years I am once again with you, conquering the childish shyness that held me back. But the moment I crossed your threshold, and met with your chilling reception, I knew that *here* was no home for me.” She stuck her hands over her face, and leaned her head wearily against the door, through which she wished to go.

Madam Möllner, like all vehement but generous natures, was speedily reconciled and moved. She hastened to her and embraced her.

“Dear child, can you not forgive an anxious mother one hasty word? I was wrong ; you are unfortunate rather than bad at heart. It was care for my son which actuated me.”

“There was no necessity for you to drive a knife into my heart. I never for a moment dreamed of becoming your son’s wife. However dear he may be to me, he is too vehement an opponent of my views for that to be possible. I hoped for no other pleasure than that of being able to call one man in the world my friend. But I can do without even that. I will prove this to you. Farewell !”

She hastened from Madam Möllner, unmoved by her entreaties, but followed by her ; and after gathering together a few little matters she had brought with her, she left the house.

The old lady looked after her with doubt and anxiety in her mind.

“What will Johannes say? He will curse his mother.” But presently she drew herself up—“In God’s name let it be so. I can bear it—it is best so.”

CHAPTER V.

THE STRENGTH OF THE WEAK.

ON the morning of the day which saw Ernestine driven from an asylum which had harboured her for a brief space, Herr Leonhardt slept unusually long. His wife did not venture to rouse him, but she looked anxiously at the old cuckoo-clock which pointed to half-past six. It was natural that the aged man should be tired out by the unusual events of yesterday. Brigit had never seen him so agitated before; he had wept bitterly on his return, wept with his poor sick eyes, and every tear had fallen scalding on the heart of his faithful mate. The villagers, whom during half a century he had served as an honourable self-devoted friend and guide, had taken up stones against him, had forgotten all that they were indebted to him for, and it broke the heart of the weary old man whose future lay wrapped in such dark clouds.

Frau Leonhardt sat on the bench by the oven. She had folded her good rough hands and was wondering in her own mind how anyone could have thought to injure the man who was her ideal of honour and dignity. Then the clockworks began to whirr, the cuckoo flung open his door and came forth. Seven times he called "cuckoo" and flapped his wings, and then slammed his door testily behind him, as though indignant at seeing nobody stirring. Frau Leonhardt rose. The old man must be woke, for the school children came at eight.

She climbed a steep narrow flight of steps into the upper storey, which was an attic, and stepped gently into the bedroom. Herr Leonhardt lay with his face to the wall.

"Old man, are you still asleep?" asked Frau Leonhardt.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Herr Leonhart startled, "Is the house on fire?"

"You are dreaming, old man; it is time for you to get up, or you will be late for school."

"But my dear wife, it is still night. Why have you got up so early?"

"Night!" laughed Frau Leonhardt, "why look,—how bewildered with sleep you must be! It is broad daylight, already seven o'clock."

"Day—broad daylight!" exclaimed the aged man in a strange tone of voice. He sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, rubbed them again, and looked into the glaring sunbeam without wincing. He turned pale as death.

"What is the matter with you, husband?" asked his wife uneasily.

"All right, mother, only still rather tired," he said with faltering voice; "go down and get coffee ready, I will follow directly."

"Shall I help you a bit? You tremble as if you had got the ague," said Brigit.

"No, no, I am well enough in health; go down now, go, there is a dear soul."

She obeyed, though reluctantly. She was accustomed to obey. When she was downstairs she began to cry without knowing well why. She put the coffee on the table. She listened for Leonhardt's step with beating heart. An eternity of twenty minutes passed. At last she heard him coming down the stairs, slowly, uncertainly, sliding his feet along. A feeling came over her as if some heavy misfortune were about to fall upon her. How strange! he groped at the door before opening it. He must be very ill. She ran to meet him, but his appearance relieved her. He was very pale, but his expression was kindly and cheerful as usual. He laid his hand on her arm.

"Well, mother, now to breakfast. I have kept you waiting."

"You have, indeed" said Brigit, and led him to table.

"Have you your appetite, and are you better?"

"Yes, my dear; pour out the coffee and serve me a little. I am still rather done up."

"To be sure." The old woman poured out the coffee. "Here is the milk"—she placed the jug beside the cup.

Herr Leonhardt took it cautiously and put his hand round his cup, so as not to pour over the edge, but nevertheless he sent some of the scalding milk upon his fingers. But he said nothing, and wiped them secretly, then he slowly conveyed the cup to his mouth. She put a little roll before him. He broke off part and ate it, but he took time to swallow it; the toothless gums chewed more slowly than usual.

"Do you enjoy your breakfast?" asked Brigit.

"To be sure. You drink also." And he listened to hear if she did so. When she had swallowed her coffee and put her cup away from her, he also thrust aside his cup, but not till he had passed his hand over the table in the direction in which he was about to move it.

The wife looked at him thoughtfully. "Old man, I think your eyes are worse to-day."

"I think so, too," answered he faintly; "Have you done your breakfast, dear wife?"

"Yes, quite."

"Then come and sit down beside me on the bench. I want to have a talk with you. Are you there? So! now give me your hand and listen to me quietly."

The old woman looked at him uneasily; she could not understand why her heart so suddenly stood still, and her breath went.

Herr Leonhardt stroked her hand, and spoke as he might to a child. "During the eighteen years that we waited for one another, and the thirty years of our married life you have never clouded one day to me, and I have done my best to keep from you what might distress you. You have borne steadfastly every common misfortune; when we buried our first children and I was ready to despair, you comforted me. I rely on finding this courage in you still. I shall have to give you a great sorrow, I cannot spare you it, and I ask you to spare me, as you always have done, the pain of seeing you overcome. Promise me!"

"For God's sake, husband, speak—I promise you everything, everything."

"You see, dear wife, what we have so long dreaded has come at last"—he drew her hands closer to him, "When I woke this morning early, it was no longer day to me."

A muffled, suppressed cry of desolation interrupted him—then all was hushed, the hands of the old woman escaped his—he groped after them, but found them not near him. She had sunk from the bench, and buried her face in her arms that he might not hear her sobs.

"Mother, where are you?" he asked presently.

The old woman clasped his knees and laid her tear-stained face upon them. "O you poor, dear, good man—blind! My God, my God!—those dear poor eyes!" And with this exclamation her violently-restrained misery burst forth, and she fell sobbing convulsively at his feet.

Herr Leonhardt gently raised her, laid her head on his shoulder, and waited patiently till the first outburst was past. He also that morning had had a moment in which none might see him save God, and he could not expect of a weak woman the control which he had not been able to obtain over himself. At last he said gently, "Mother, you have done everything for me that wife could do, more I have often thought could not have been done. And yet the good God has seen fit to increase the measure of your self-sacrifice in your old days, and to lay on you a heavier yoke than you had anticipated. He makes me helpless, takes from you, old and weary pilgrim, your proper stay, and forces you to become the crutch on which I must lean on my way to the grave. This is hard indeed; but, dear Brigit, when the Lord calls, what must be our answer?"

"Lord, here am I!" said his wife, and in the tone of her voice lay a wondrous self-devotion and readiness. She threw her arms round her grey-haired husband, and her tears flowed more gently, as she added, "I will lead and support you, and never be weary."

"I thank you, true heart, and now for my sake regain your composure. Think what it would have been if you had

found me this morning dead in my bed. Would not that have been worse?"

"Oh, a thousand times worse."

"Well, then, let us not murmur because God has seen fit to deprive me of one of the five senses with which he has endowed men that they may enjoy the beauty of His creation. He leaves me four. If I can no more see your dear face, I can hear your kind comforting voice, and feel your loving solicitude for my welfare. Though I shall no more see the sun, I shall be able to warm myself in his beams, inhale the fragrance of the flowers he calls forth, enjoy the fruit he ripens, and hear the song of the birds chanted in his praise—and I shall value all these and praise my Maker—yes, with full heart. How much, how very much He has left me. We will not haggle with Him about the measure of his mercies, like the thankless beggar who repays the giver of an alms by grumbling that it is not more. For sixty-eight years I have seen the sun, why should I murmur at God placing a bandage over my eyes before He admits me to eternal light, like a child who is being led before a Christmas-tree. I will bear my bandage patiently and prepare my soul worthily to see the beauty, the glory that awaits me. We will look at it in this manner, dear wife, and then we shall not be downcast."

The old man was silent. His eyes beamed with an inner light, a reflection of those heavenly rays which his spirit saw.

His wife had listened to him with folded hands. Her simple soul saw something of his greatness, and was lifted above itself. The peaceful hush that surrounded them was too holy to be broken by any earthly sound. Her eyes rested, tearless, on the noble features of her husband, the highest object of veneration in her little world, and she waited humbly for another word from him. At last a word struggled to the surface, the only one that harmonized with the place and time: "Our son!" A painful quiver passed across his features. "This is the worst of all!—our poor son! May God give him the same strength which he formerly gave me, when I also was forced to abandon an University course to become a village schoolmaster. I have

communicated to him the opinion of the doctor, which I have kept back from you to spare you pain as long as possible. My son wrote back by return a letter which I will let you see now, when nothing must be concealed from you. Read it, and rejoice that you have such a son !”

“The good lad !”

“He will give up his studies, and take my situation, so as to retain this our old home to us.

“But will the authorities allow this ?”

“Yes ; I have already obtained the requisite permission.”

“You wise, prudent man !” exclaimed his wife, much moved ; “you have so carefully provided for everything, with this great grief lying on your heart, and kept it all the while from me ! And now you are comforting me, instead of I you. O my God ! how was I, humble creature, worthy of such a husband ?”

She kissed his thin hand. Just then the clatter of the scholars’ feet was heard along the passage. Herr Leonhardt rose and walked towards the door.

“Wait—I will lead you,” exclaimed Brigit.

“No, no !” he said, smiling, as he waved her off. “I have been for some time preparing for my blindness by practising myself in going about with closed eyes, so as not to be too helpless when the event should take place. You see I can manage it, and find my own way perfectly.” He had reached the door and passed through it.

“Good day, children !” he called to the little ones, and felt along his wall to the schoolroom, followed anxiously by Frau Leonhardt. He stumbled slightly at the threshold, “Never mind, never mind !” he said, as Brigit put out her hand to support him. “I only want practice, and then all will run smooth.”

He sought and found his old desk ; and there he placed himself till the children had streamed in after him. “Are you all there ?”

“Yes,” was the cry.

“Well, I must tell you first that there will be no school to-day. Dear children, I must say farewell to you from this day. I shall teach you no more. God has deprived me of

sight. I can no more see you and your exercises. I must, therefore, give up my charge of you. Your parents will, I dare say, discover in what has befallen me a punishment, a judgment, on what I did yesterday ; but I tell you that he who takes the trials sent him by the Lord aright, sees in them mercies, and not judgments. Remember this, my children. The hour of your journey approaches in which you will understand what was your old teacher's meaning. And now come, each of you, and give me your hand, one after another—so ! I thank you for your childish love and attachment ; those few who have withheld it I forgive from my heart. My son will shortly take my place ; promise me to honour him and lighten his heavy duty by your diligence and obedience. Good bye, my dear children ; the Lord bless you and keep you."

He stretched forth his hands, and the children crowded, sobbing, round to press and kiss them.

"Who is that?" asked the old man, as each came up, and he shook the little hand when the name was given him.

"Now, do not cry any more, good children. We do not part for life. You will pass the school-house many a Sunday, and give a little paw to your old teacher as he sits on the bench before the door. And then you will let me guess by the voice who it is, and let me measure how much you are grown ; and you will tell me what you have done and learned in the week. And whoever has done best in the examination shall have a couple of nuts or one of my pears, or whatever there may be in my garden. Won't that be nice?"

The children were very quickly comforted by this prospect, and ran off to tell their parents the news.

The old man now stood alone with his wife in the empty school-room. "Come, dear wife, we will send a message to Walter." He laid his hand on his desk : a tear fell on it. "It is strange," he said, "how hard it is to tear oneself from a spot where one has long worked, even though it may have been at a toilsome, disappointing task. That place to which attaches the consciousness of duty fulfilled is home, and when we leave it, it is as though we went abroad."

He laid his arm in that of Brigit, and, with bowed head stepped over the threshold which separated him from the scene of his life's labour. Now, for the first time, did he appear a broken man in the eyes of his watchful wife.

"I must leave you alone for an hour now, dear old man," said she, leading him to the bench by the stove. "I must do a little cooking for dinner."

"Do so, mother. Man must eat, whether sad or merry. And in reality we are not sad, are we?" He forced a smile, and patted her on the shoulder.

"No, my old man, we are not," said his wife, fighting against her rising tears.

He seated himself on the bench. "Send the servant-lad at once to town, to fetch Walter."

"Of course. I shall have no peace of mind till he is with us; and I must also send for the doctor."

"Not for the doctor. He can no longer be of service to me."

"But it will be a satisfaction to me; so allow me." And she left the room.

The old schoolmaster sat quiet and silent. "I must now learn my new occupation, that hardest of all—doing nothing," he thought, and he closed his hands and looked out into his night. He had sat thus some while, when the cuckoo called nine o'clock. But the last "Cuckoo" stuck in his throat, and the bird stood motionless in his open doorway. The clock had run down. For the first time in many years Herr Leonhardt had forgotten to wind it up. He rose and felt his way towards it, then cautiously drew down the chains. The cuckoo recovered breath, finished his broken strain, and slammed his door on himself well satisfied. "I shall not forget you again, old comrade, who have called me to so many happy or sorrowful hours. How slowly time will pass now, as I sit waiting for you to announce the end of another interminable hour."

So thought the old man, and he made his way back to his old place. "However, I have done something," he said, as he reseated himself. And then, minute after minute, and quarter after quarter, crept by, and the old man sat silent

with nothing to occupy him but his thoughts. His head drooped on his breast, lower and lower, his darkness made him sleepy. At last he ceased to think.

His wife looked in once or twice, but withdrew, as she did not wish to interrupt his slumber.

It was nearly twelve o'clock.

Then something rustled through the door. The old man felt a gentle draught, then steps hastily approaching him, and he raised his head. The person who had come in fell at his feet. He put forth his hand, and touched waving silken hair.

"Father Leonhardt!"

"Oh, this is Fräulein Ernestine!"

Ernestine looked at him. Her attention was attracted by his eyes. She saw with dismay that the pupil did not contract before the light.

"Herr Leonhardt, what is the matter with your eyes?"

"They have given up service," he answered, smiling.

"Heavens! already? I thought they would have lasted for months."

"A few months sooner or later matters little," said the old man, calmly.

Ernestine contemplated him with astonishment. Involuntarily she folded her hands. "Is it possible? I shudder with horror at the sight of such a misfortune, and you, on whom it has fallen, bear it so easily? Tell me—Oh, tell me, whence do you draw this supernatural power?"

The aged man raised his dead eyes. "From religion, my dear young lady."

Ernestine looked down. "What, *you*?"

"Yes, I!" said Herr Leonhardt.

A long pause ensued. Presently the old schoolmaster asked, sympathetically, "How are you, after the distressing occurrences of yesterday?"

"Oh, Father Leonhardt, don't talk to me about myself. Up to this moment I thought myself very wretched; but your misfortune has taught me to despise my own troubles. What, compared with yours, is the sorrow arising out of disappointed expectations? What does it matter to me if I

am spurned by men because they think differently from myself? What would their esteem profit me, and what loss do I feel from their contempt? The former would not give me, the latter would not rob me of, one sunbeam—not one star-ray. I can see the golden orb of day: it lights me to my labour; and I am young and active, and ready to work. I see the beauty of the world; all things paint their pictures on the narrow frame of my eye; my soul bathes in light, and am I to see another great and enlightened soul set in eternal night without a murmur, and find room in my thoughts for wounded pride and galled vanity? No, Father Leonhardt, you blessed martyr, I brush off my own griefs and cry only for you." She placed her head in his hands, and broke into passionate sobs.

"My daughter," said the old man, much moved, "you are not telling me the truth. The pain you suffer must be great; for only a heart that suffers can sympathise thus keenly with another's trouble. Now, indeed, you are crying for me; but these tears were already gathered in your heart."

"Oh, Father Leonhardt! you see with your blind eyes! I came here seeking counsel and comfort from your paternal heart; and you have comforted me before I have confessed to you my sorrow. There, look! it was only for a moment that I forgot myself. It is over. Your noble example has braced me up again. But let my trouble lie dead and buried. I can and will only speak with you now about yourself. I beg you, take me as your daughter. You have behaved towards me as a father; let me treat you in return as a child. Yesterday you exposed your venerable head to protect me. Come to my house along with your wife. I will be with you as much as I can; will read to you and talk to you. Alas! I am so solitary; and I do not know how it is, but I begin to yearn for love."

Herr Leonhardt folded his hands. "Oh, my God, what an angel hast Thou sent me to comfort me, and what joys hast Thou laid up in store for me here below! I can see—yes, I can see with my blind eyes—into a heart that opens out before me and reveals undreamed-of beauties. God bless

thee, my daughter! May He make His face to shine upon thee, that thou mayest come at last to know Him, thy Benefactor, who showers on thee the richest treasures of His grace." He ceased, and bethought himself, and then said, almost shyly, "Forgive me; I fell into a strain which will find no echo in your heart. I fell into it because in my youth I studied theology, and something of the parson sticks to me still. It would look as though I were trying to convert you; but such an attempt is far from my thoughts. I, a broken-down old man, am not the one to constrain this proud spirit. I only seek to gather up the crumbs of love that fall to my share from your richly-decked heart, and to thank you for them."

"Father Leonhardt, do not undervalue yourself. You must feel how high you stand in my esteem. When, yesterday, I saw you standing before those coarse men in your modest, simple grandeur, I felt, for the first time since my childhood, a sensation of reverence. You, a homely man, understand me. You have consideration for me, whereas all the rest misrepresent and denounce me. You stood by me in the moment of danger, without attempting to screen yourself by one word. Oh, you are a noble, true man! Oh, let me find rest on your fatherly heart, and provide a home for you, and a future for your son."

"I thank you—I thank you heartily, my dear child; but I could not accept your generosity, and, thank Gød, do not need to do so. My son has already declared his readiness to give up his medical studies, and to take my place in the school. Our future is, consequently, provided for. We need not leave our dear old school-house; and I may die where I have spent my life."

"Is such a thought of value to you?" asked Ernestine.

"Yes; it is all that I care for now. One who, like you, is putting off into the sea of life with swelling sails, has no idea of the conditions of life which we hangers-on upon civilization are content with. These conditions, this clinging to the little spot allotted to us, bring their special happiness,—the contentment of habit. You might say that habit deadens appreciation; but that is only the case in

appearance. A character strong in itself will throw its roots down deep in the clod to which it is bound, with the same energy with which it would have assimilated all that came in its way if given expansion in the wide world. And such a character cannot be removed from its clod in old age without the rending of all its soul-fibres, the sacrifice of half its life. I love this little corner of earth, this little house, which is all the world to me. I think it would kill me to be told that I must leave it."

Ernestine listened to him meditatively. "Well, then, if I cannot offer you any assistance that would be acceptable, I can, at all events, offer your son the means of prosecuting his studies. My library and my apparatus are at his service, and I hope he will not refuse to use them in his leisure hours."

"This is indeed a benefit which I may accept, though I may never hope to repay it! I thank you in my son's name. You will feel the happiness of having saved from wreck what is the most precious to a man of all he has—his hopes of the future."

"You wonderful man, you astonish me!" said Ernestine, warmly. "I see more and more the depth and cultivation of your mind. What a struggle it must have cost you to settle down here among these savages."

The old man smiled. "Why, one soon rubs down to their level, and feels no incongruity in the position. At first I was conceited enough to think I was too good for these folk. But my faith taught me that no one is too good for the position in which God has placed him. When I was a student I was very fond of the theatre, and was often at it. On one occasion, as I was leaving, I overheard the manager say of a troublesome member of his company, 'He will take no inferior parts; why, bless my soul, all can't take the first rôle!' The manager had no idea of the lesson he was then teaching me. 'All cannot play the first rôle,' is what I said to myself whenever my pride made me dissatisfied with my lot, and I devoted myself with all my power to play my inferior part on the stage of life. After awhile I felt that I cared for no better reward than

to hear the Lord say to me some day, 'Well done, good and faithful, though humble, member of the company.'"

"All cannot play the first rôle," murmured Ernestine; "Father Leonhardt you have given me, in this sentence, something to think about." She remained silent for a time, then pressed her hand on her brow. "No—to be nothing but a supernumerary, who rises to the surface to dive back again into obscurity; who for one scant moment arrests attention, but who might just as well have been left out—no, I could not endure that." She sprang up and paced the room.

"O, dear Fräulein ——"

"Father, call me plain Ernestine; it would be pleasant to be thus addressed by you, if I deserve it. How can you, who have been drawn so near to me, go on giving me cold empty titles of courtesy?"

"Well, I will do so, Ernestine, if you will allow me,—I will do so gladly. Well, dear child, I was about to remark that no one who does his duty could 'just as well have been left out.' In the eyes of the world, yes; but it does not do to take the world for one's public, and seek satisfaction in its applause. Modesty holds most men back from supposing themselves to be elect beings called to step forth on the stage of the world before an auditory of whole nations."

Ernestine reddened.

Leonhardt went on. "Every man finds companions, and in his little company can play a principal part, with his friends for public, and their regard for his reward. Among these few he is no supernumerary; he is not one who 'rises to the surface to dive back into obscurity?' Is it not worth while living for a wife, a husband, or a friend to whom one is everything?"

"Father Leonhardt this can be a comfort only to those who live a subjective life, whose centre of gravity is never moved out of the circle of selfish interests. But one who has left this sphere, and made the general interests of mankind his own, such an one can only live with the world and for it, and can no more return to the subjective pleasure

of personal gratifications than can the plant return to the seed from which it has sprung."

"Indeed, Ernestine?" exclaimed a well-known voice behind her.

She turned round startled. Johannes, standing in the open door, had heard the last sentences. His cheeks glowed as with fever, his broad breast heaved and sank passionately as he stepped towards her. "So—so! you could fly from me?" He took Ernestine's hand in his, and fixed a moist, anguished look on her, as though he would dive to the bottom of her soul, to find there the pearl, the pearl of love, hidden so deep below. He gazed on her with fervent entreaty, insistingly, as he pressed her small hand in his. Every heavy breath was a prayer, every drop on his burning brow a remonstrance. Pain, anxiety, haste in pursuit, had shaken this man with muscle and nerve of steel, and he trembled. Ernestine saw, heard, felt all, but she stood silent and motionless. She could not open her lips, she could not utter a sound. She was stunned, petrified. "Ernestine!" exclaimed Johannes again, "Ernestine!" and the tone in which he spoke pierced her to the core. A faint moan passed her lips. She bowed her head towards him, she was almost sinking into his arms, when a shadow glided between them,—the shadow of his mother,—and disturbed her sight so that she saw that man no more in his beauty; no more the tears that stood in his eyes. A chill and darkness fell about her as when clouds steal before the sun. The shadow of his mother scared her from his heart.

She raised her head, and withdrew her hand.

He let his arms fall despairingly. A moment of exhaustion followed the intense excitement, he wiped his brow, and thought that the handkerchief must come away bloodstained from his face. All his veins bounded, there was a roaring in his ears, a tumult in his breast, as though he must sink shattered in mind and body. But he recovered himself, and went with wavering steps towards Leonhardt.

"God strengthen you, dear Herr Leonhardt," said he, in broken tones. "I know all, through the messenger sent to

your son, whom I met on my way. There is no need for me to speak a word of consolation to you. You are a *man* and as such will bear your affliction."

"I am a *Christian*, Professor, which is more than the manliness of a feeble creature like me."

"True, true," said Johannes, glancing sadly at Ernestine, who stood apart. She stepped up and said, with quivering voice, "Father Leonhardt, I must go home, and so say good-bye for to-day. When your son comes, send him to me." She held out her hand to Möllner. "Forgive me ; I could not act otherwise."

Johannes struggled against his emotion, and said, with forced composure, "I will write to you."

Ernestine bowed without answering, and departed. The old man listened. He caught her retreating footsteps, and the panting breath of Johannes, and again he saw with his blind eyes.

"O, Professor! do not let her depart, fly after her, and speak with her yourself. Believe me, she is an angel, and deserves another good word from you. Nothing is done by writing ; remember the uncle who may intercept the letter. Speak yourself, that is far better. Be quick, quick—or you will make yourself and her unhappy."

"You are right, thank you for your advice, dear friend," exclaimed Johannes, and the flame of hope shot up again clear. Before he had finished speaking he was outside the door.

The wife of the schoolmaster came in with the soup, and looked with surprise after him. "The gentleman is in a hurry," she said.

"Let be, dear mother. The young folk are striving amidst a thousand anxieties and sorrows to reach a goal which we old people look back upon in peace. God guide them!"

* * * * *

Johannes called to his coachman, who was near the school-house, to wait for him there, and followed Ernestine who

was walking slowly along the footpath before him. All was quiet and lonely, for it was midday, when the peasants were at their dinner.

She looked round as she heard Johannes' step behind her, and stood still. He quickly caught her up.

"Ernestine," he said resolutely, "I must speak a last decisive word with you; Leonhardt was right; it must be said by mouth from heart to heart. Will you listen to me?"

"Yes."

He took her arm in his; they ascended the hill to the castle, talking to one another.

"Look you, dear Ernestine, I would give all I have to undo what has passed between you and my mother. You have been mortally injured, and that too as my guest, and in a house which should have been to you as a home. But it happened in my absence, and I am blameless. You will not punish me for it?"

"No, my friend; certainly not."

"Then be noble-minded, and forgive my mother for what she will never forgive herself."

"I have nothing to forgive."

"You are inexorable in your righteous indignation. Let me hope that the time will come when my mother may make amends to you for the injury done you to-day. Dearest, best Ernestine, she has scared back your young, scarce-awakened heart—she has made an ill preparation for what I wanted to say to you now; and yet—and yet—I must speak; it has gone too far for me to keep silence any longer. Yes, Ernestine, I was going to ask you to-day to be my wife—to ask you to make me that sacrifice which marriage exacts of every woman, but which would be an especially costly one to you. I am sure when I have shewn you what are the lot and duties of a wife, they will not seem to you so dreadful as they did from the practical, somewhat pedantic description made by my mother. I hope that our circumstances would allow of your being spared the material cares of life which revolt you, and on which my mother laid exaggerated stress. I will not plant my white rose in a

kitchen garden. You will be the pride and ornament of my life. I ask nothing of you but love for my warm heart, sympathy in my scientific studies, and consideration for my faults." He caught her hand and stood still. "Ernestine, will you grant me this?"

He waited her answer with restrained breath: his eyes in vain sought to pierce her lowered lids.

She preserved her stony calmness, and no human eye could read what passed in the depths of her soul. At last her pale lips breathed almost inaudibly, "I cannot—your mother—I cannot!"

"O, do not make her your pretext. If you cannot love me, do not let her suppose that on her hangs the curse of having robbed her son of the object on which his heart was set. That would be too cruel a punishment. If you do love me, conquer your little pride by the nobler one of being able to show her how mistaken she has been in you. Shew her that you have the feelings of a woman, that you can make a sacrifice, and you will see her more deeply humbled than your most revengeful indignation could desire."

"The sacrifice which she demands I cannot bring, and, even if I could, I would not bring it, precisely because she *demand*ed it, because she made a *condition* of it. A free soul will not sell its convictions even at the price of a life's happiness. If your mother requires of me to abandon my plans of following an academic course, to bury unripened all the fruit of my labours up to now, it is excusable, because she has no idea of the immensity of her demand. But if you were to make the same requirements of me you would not only cease to be my husband, but even my friend, for then you would entirely misunderstand me."

"My God! Ernestine, what do we ask of you other than that which every man must ask of the woman who belongs to him, that she should live for him wholly and exclusively? But how could you do that without conquering your ambition, and retiring from public to private life? You would not be asked to abandon science. You would be my confidante, my assistant in my labours, my friend and colleague. Your great mind would be given full occupation. But publicly

you could not appear to lecture and play the 'Doctor.' The fair name of my wife could not be made a butt for misunderstanding and ridicule."

Ernestine started as though struck by an arrow.

"You use your mother's own words. What! Do you feel yourself so superior to a woman's mind, and are not ashamed to echo parrot-like your mother's speeches?"

"Ernestine, you are unjust. You know my views of the position and rights of woman; you cannot expect me to be untrue to my most sacred convictions, when taking the most important step in my life."

"And yet you ask this of me?"

"A woman has no convictions, Ernestine; she has only feelings for or against things. Where it has to do with feelings, the stronger must conquer the weaker. Hitherto you have had sympathy with the *sorrows* of your sex, for you have yourself experienced only these. When you love, you will learn what are its *joys*, and will gladly abandon the useless contest at the wish of your husband."

"You think so, do you?" asked Ernestine with unwonted sharpness.

"I hope so, for so only could we be happy. I am an honourable man, and therefore at the outset I tell you what I expect. I will not influence your decision by flattery and evasion of debatable ground. You must form it with a full knowledge of the duties that will be imposed on you—otherwise it is worthless. You may think this is a rough courtship, and you may be right. But I will not win my wife with gallantries which make woman's vanity take the side of the suitor. I will not owe my wife to any weakness, and vanity is such. Your love for me shall be your strength. I would have you great when I clasp you to my heart, and when is a woman greater than when she gives up herself and conquers her pride, in order that she may dedicate herself to another. To conquer self is what heroes who have conquered whole nations have found too hard for them to accomplish; it is an act of supreme human perfection. The world, to be sure, will not clap applause; the noblest deeds often never come before the eyes of the many, for in with-

drawal from recognition lies a greatness which few can compass. What sublimity of self-sacrifice is often, for instance, hidden behind the walls of a cloister of which the world knows and cares nothing! How many a heart there secretly bleeding achieves the last and hardest conquest over every human passion, and with no one to reward it, no one to crown it with laurels. What awaits these immeasurable pains? The grave. You Ernestine are asked a far less sacrifice, to receive in recompense the best applause a woman can win, the approval of a loving husband. Can you still hesitate? Must you still struggle to make up your mind? Cannot this queenly soul free itself from the servitude of a false ambition imposed upon it? O Ernestine! Do not keep me longer entreating, speak the word, to whom will you belong henceforth—to your uncle or to me?”

“To neither,—to no man,—to myself alone.” And she measured Johannes with an almost hostile look. “I see now that you are the true son of your mother. I see her stern features, I hear her reproaching voice. I see myself between you both, helpless, not allowed to think or feel for myself, still less to dare venture to make myself of repute in the world. I am expected to cast aside the leading idea of my life, the desire of my days and nights, like a worn-out gown, and to go with you before your mother, resigned to her caprices, excusing myself like a child, and promising to be better, that I may receive a condescending kiss of pardon from her cold lips! No, again and again, no, *no*! What justifies your mother in attempting to save and reform me as a criminal? To whom have I ever done any harm? What law of morals have I outraged, that I should be treated as a common offender? I have lived modestly and quietly for myself, and by myself, asking no happiness but the happiness of work. What urges her to force me to embrace a happiness of a different sort for which I have not the smallest inclination? Did I force myself upon her? Did I not struggle against your earnest representations to accept the shelter of your house? How can she believe that she acted rightly in spurning me from her without other chance of returning than surrender to her hard terms? O

Johannes! if your love had been as generous as your character seemed at first to be; if you had loved me for what I am, with my eccentricities and failings, not for what you supposed you could have manufactured me into, I would have striven for your sake to become the most perfect being I could. And if you had said to me, be my companion, I will help you to fight for the honour of womanhood, what is sacred to you will be sacred also to me; if you had thus taken account of my individuality, and had placed your happiness, your honour in my hands without exacting pledges of me other than those which you were ready yourself to fulfil towards me, I would have bowed under the influence of such a feeling. I would have cheerfully made sacrifice of my freedom to you. I would have done more. I would even have humbled myself before your haughty mother. But you come before me quite otherwise: you come as the echo of her voice. You ask of me, as the exclusive condition of happiness, that I should be just what your mother wishes; you seek security that I shall submit without remonstrance to all your demands, so that you may be sure of running no risks from the headstrong creature whom you would make your wife. Now our separation is complete. I have lost you, and all I have to thank you for is the certainty that I am unsuited for the world in which you move, and that I am wretched."

Johannes stood before her pale and silent, but his clear conscience shone through his honest eyes. Ernestine did not dare to look at him. She tore the leaves with trembling hands from a twig she had plucked out of the hedge.

"This explanation closes our relations with one another," he said, and every word seemed to drop like molten iron from his lips into her heart. He gasped for breath as one who has gone through some violent exertion. "I will not answer the reproaches you heap on my mother and me; they pain me, they are unworthy of your noble soul. I have behaved towards you in accordance with my ideas of honour. I have told you plainly what, according to my views, is the sole guarantee for happiness in married life. I am convinced that you do not love me, because you refuse the de-

sired sacrifice,—because you are able to refuse it. This separates us. But please to remember that I was not thinking only of myself when I made my demand. As an honourable man I am bound to ask whether the woman whom I would take to my heart would prove a true mother to the dear beings to whom she might be called upon to give life.” His voice grew soft at these words. “You have not satisfied me that you would prove such; your heart is not ripe for that great, devoted, self-forgetting love, which alone befits woman for the heavy duties marriage entails. Will it ever ripen to this? Who can tell? Perhaps some other man will reap what I have sowed in pain. I make no reproaches, how can I?” He laid his hands on her head, the tears trickled down his cheeks. He looked intently at her, silent, overwhelmed by his suffering. She sank under this look; her artificial composure left her, a cry escaped her lips. Now for the first time she felt what her pride had done, and her heart trembled under the responsibility of having laid on him such a weight, the greatness of which she had not guessed.

Johannes gently stroked her brow. Her agitation restored his composure.

“You are good, Ernestine; you feel how you have hurt me, and it grieves you. That is the way with women—and this little weakness does you honour in my eyes. I entreat you control yourself; you see I have mastered myself again.” He was about to withdraw his hand from hers, she held it fast, and looked at him with sad entreating eyes,—those eyes which had exercised a magic influence on him even in childhood.

“Do not wholly desert me!” she whispered, with choking voice.

“No, as truly as I hope that God may not desert me, so truly will I not desert you. I will not fly from you like a coward, who turns his back on an unattainable treasure so as to lighten the denial to him and learn to forget it. You need a friend who may protect you, and in your doubtful position may stand between you and the world, and—your uncle. Such a friend will I remain till you find a better. Do not

fear to be tormented any more with words of love, or with lamentations. I will struggle with my sorrow alone. Your happiness shall be my only thought. Farewell—when you need me, call me.”

He once more pressed her hands, and then walked away without looking back.

Ernestine gazed after him as he strode away in his manly dignity. She looked and looked till he vanished behind a corner. Then she fell on her knees and cried in a burst of agony, “Have I really been able to do this?”

She had lain thus long under the shady cherry-tree, when she was startled by the rumble of the wheels of one of the castle carriages passing. Her uncle was in it; he arrested the driver, and got out.

“You may take the horses out, I shall not go to town,” he called to the coachman. The latter turned the horses’ heads and drove back to the house.

Leuthold stood silent before Ernestine, and racked her with a piercing, questioning glance. He had heard from Frau Willmers the circumstance of Ernestine’s taking refuge with Madam Möllner, but not that his ward had seen Johannes before yesterday, when he had protected her from the rabble. Scarce eight days had elapsed since his departure, and his charge had escaped him—had fled with an utter stranger! This was impossible. Ernestine was not a coward; a crowd of drunken boors would not precipitate her into the arms of a casual acquaintance. She must have met this heroic champion before. He questioned the servants, but they were hand and glove with Willmers, and insisted that they knew nothing about it, but supposed that the Fraulein had met the Herr in the schoolhouse, for many strangers visited there.

This satisfied Leuthold that the ground was undermined beneath his feet; and for a moment he felt prostrated by the rush of cares that swept over him. Could a woman have been kept more under supervision than had been Ernestine? and yet feelings had woke in that locked heart which he had supposed killed long ago—feelings which sought to unfold in the world without, whose seeds he had deemed

dead. All his efforts seemed to have failed. And this, too, at a moment when he was fighting for life and death with ruin, and needed for the battle his undivided attention, and a mind free from other cares.

It was too much : the suspicion came over him that Fate had decreed his fall. But he gathered up his courage, and thought over matters in all their bearings, with his usual foresight in adversity. In his greatest need he turned to his reason to help and guide him, as we turn to God, in hours of despondency.

He allowed himself a short time to rest, after having recovered himself from the shock, and then he ordered the horses to be harnessed, intending to drive to town, and reclaim his ward. But to his agreeable surprise he found her near home, in a condition of unmistakable desolation.

"You are like the mermaid in your precious story-book, who stepped out of her natural element," said he, smiling. "The men among whom you have gone have been disappointed to find that you do not end off with a fish's tail ; but you, I expect, have discovered that it does not do for you to live amongst those who are not your equals."

As he approached, deep wrinkles formed on his brow ; and when the coachman was gone, he exclaimed in great alarm, "Good heavens ! Do I find you so ; crying by the wayside like a homeless beggar ?"

"Yes ; like a homeless beggar," echoed Ernestine.

"But, my dear, is this proper, to make a scene on the public road, and let any passer-by see you wriggling on the ground like a worm ?"

She looked at him. His bald head was covered with a broad-brimmed light grey felt hat. As usual, he was dressed with scrupulous neatness. Standing thus before her, with eyes watching her intently, his tall thin form bent, he seemed to her so like a snake—a poisonous snake—that she sprang up with undisguised aversion, and thrust him from her.

He took a step back, and looked at her with astonishment.

"What ! is this Ernestine von Hartwich, whom I brought up ; whom nothing has hitherto startled out of her philo-

sophical composure? or has some elf given me a fractious, spiteful changeling in her place?"

"Cease your mockery, Uncle," said Ernestine, authoritatively, "it disgusts me."

Leuthold's astonishment increased more and more. "What is this? What do I hear? Are these the manners you have picked up at Madam Möllner's? I really believe, Ernestine, you must be ill?"

"Yes, yes, I am ill; and I beg you to leave me. You have not the means of curing me."

"Has it come so far in the few days you have been deprived of my counsel and protection? Well, I do not know what has happened, but I am sure that things have gone ill with you. I will make you no reproaches for having picked up acquaintances behind my back, and left the house without my permission, and thrown me into the most distressing alarm, for I see you have been sufficiently punished. But I beg you not to repeat this sort of thing; you have found by experience what must come of it."

"Uncle, do not you also assume the airs of addressing me as a child, who is expected to say after its scolding, 'I won't do it again.' If I *wished* to return to the world, with which yesterday I became for the first time acquainted, you could not forbid me, for"—she used unconsciously the words of Madam Möllner—"you cannot forbid me doing what is against no law. But I do *not* wish to do so—never, never again. I am strange among men—I do not understand their ways, and they do not understand mine." She looked gloomily at Leuthold. "I do not know whether you have done rightly in bringing me up as a recluse, in making me incapable of living with others, so wholly unsuited for associating with the world. It is quite possible that I might have been happier if left by you in my simplicity, and had not been driven into paths where I have lost myself, and whence is no return. But now it is too late to sigh over the past. The responsibility of what has been done rests with you. I cannot turn back, and so I will not look back. I will push ahead on my lonely path, and work as no other woman has worked before, till I can shame all disbelievers

in woman's powers. But uncle, I warn you! If that day does not come which shall comfort me and reward me for all I have sacrificed by crowning me with fame—if that day does not come—I shall curse you."

She spoke these last words with an emphasis which affected even the cold-blooded Leuthold, and made him turn pale. He quickly divined the circumstances. He saw that she had made some sacrifice to her ambition which she felt, after the sacrifice had been made, was disproportionate. His practised judgment speedily put two and two together. An event had occurred, the importance of which he did not under-estimate. He saw that a turning-point had been reached, where he must use his utmost caution not to mar his plans by too precipitate speech. He said nothing till they reached the garden-door. He opened it, and let Ernestine enter. As they passed the mound where she had spoken with Johannes the evening before, she burst into tears. Leuthold looked at her with estrangement. She speedily recovered herself, and stepped forward more quickly. Again, as usual, he acted as does cold water on a wound, stopping its bleeding.

"I was exasperated," he said at last, "when I heard this morning, on my arrival, what had taken place. With these clowns you are not secure of your life. We must now make up our minds to leave this place, it is quite impossible for us to remain longer in the midst of these boors." He watched her keenly.

She made a motion of objection.

"Not so! Why, what attraction can you find in this spot?"

Ernestine did not answer. After a while she said, "Very well. You have made the suggestion, and I will consider it."

They entered the house.

"Ernestine, I have brought the promised monograph on spasmodic muscular cardiac contraction. Would you like to see it now?"

"No, I wish to go to my room and rest."

Leuthold did not know what to do. He knew that she

must not be left to herself. He hoped to take advantage of her state of nervous excitement for fathoming the mystery she hid from him. They had already reached the door, when he said, "By-the-by, Ernestine, I congratulate you."

"What on?"

"I made so bold this morning as to run my eyes over the essay you had begun, and left on your desk, and which you have kept back from me so long. I assure you I was astonished. It surpasses all your former achievements; it will be a firebrand flung into the midst of the scientific world."

Ernestine let go the door-handle, which she had taken hold of. She looked sadly at him. "They won't let it in."

"You need not be afraid of that. Such a thing as that must make its way. How did you hit on this magnificent discovery?"

"In the usual way; by induction. All that is wanted is evidence to lift it from theory into fact."

"I have no fear of that failing. Girl, you have a great future open to you! I thought I knew you; but you have surprised me again and again by the strides made by your growing intellect."

"Uncle, I scarce dare hope so longer. Now I know how contemptuously men of science regard learned women. Nothing can be done by words; evidence, unassailable evidence, must be produced which they cannot disregard or dispute. Modern science demands proofs; and till these are forthcoming prejudiced heads will never be convinced."

"You may be well assured that any man who reads what you have written will be stimulated to make experiments to demonstrate its truth. Leave practical experimentalists to do this, which is mere drudgery. The production of the idea is yours."

"But if they think it worth their trouble to begin a series of experiments in this matter, and begin them without sufficient precision, and do not arrive at the results I expect, my theory will be tossed aside as the empty hypothesis of a learned twaddler. Even Du Chatel was ridiculed when she suggested the theory that the different coloured rays in the

spectrum possess different temperatures. How did it avail her that, forty years after her propounding this theory, Rochon discovered by experiment that it was a true hypothesis?*

She was long fallen to dust; and not even the laurel of original discovery was laid on her grave. Alas! it is a sad existence, this of battling step by step for our rights! How long will it last?"

Involuntarily she had left her door and approached her uncle. He grasped the hands which she wrung in her excitement. He felt she was again in his power. "How long? Till a woman arises who has power to defy men. All these great heroines were Brunhilds, powerful till some Siegfried came and broke their power. You, Ernestine, are perhaps the only woman capable of carrying out your task to its completion with cool blood and clear head. You will trample down the prejudices of the world. You will do this, and no man will know who has helped you. I have long ceased to think and care for myself. You are my pride. You are more than my child. You are the child of my brain. Your education was my work: your fame is mine. Come, then; I have been thinking over what you have written, and fancy I see my way to an experiment which may establish your hypothesis."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Ernestine, on fire, "really?"

"Come into the laboratory: we will see for ourselves."

"Uncle," said Ernestine, in overflowing gratitude, "you give me new life. Forgive me if I misunderstood you for a moment, and did you an injustice."

"Do not trouble yourself about that, dear child; we shall remain staunch friends. I dare say those people tried to set you against me, and you gave them credence. Why, in heaven's name, who has not his weak moments?"

"Yes, yes, Uncle, it was a weak moment with me!" and, full of shame, she covered her face.

"I suspect," said Leuthold, calmly, with his still, melodious,

* See Du Bois Reymond: "Voltaire in seine Beziehungen zur Natur-Wissenschaft." Berlin, 1868.

insinuating voice, "that your heart has been over-charged. You have been spoken to of love,—asked to be a wife. Was it not so?"

Ernestine did not answer.

"Someone thought he saw a female Samson in you, and wanted to cut your locks, and then shout over you, 'The Philistines be upon thee!'"

Ernestine interrupted, "Uncle, silence! I will not have you speak thus of a man who to me is sacred!"

"God forbid that I should wound you. I do not speak of him, but of his mamma, who trots him about attached to her apron-string." He threw a hasty glance at her.

"Do not mention his mother to me, I hate her!" exclaimed Ernestine, vehemently, and mounted with him the steps to the laboratory.

Now Leuthold knew enough. "I can imagine how these people exerted their influence against me; for those who seek to win you must first clear me out of the road. They know that well enough, and it is natural that they should attempt it. But your sound common sense, no doubt, pointed out to you that these folk wanted something of you, and that no trifle, but *yourself*; and that therefore they were actuated by a selfish motive; whereas I, as you must well know, have always acted unselfishly towards you. They attempt to depreciate you in your own eyes, so that you may sell yourself cheaper. I can see by the depressed state in which I found you how they must have humbled you! I restore to you your self-respect; and from this you may see that I ask nothing of you but that you will be true to yourself. You are ashamed of what has happened. I am gratified by your recovery from it. And now we remain on the same terms as of old! Is it not so?"

"Yes, Uncle!" exclaimed Ernestine, raising herself. "Now come, we will try the experiment you spoke of."

Leuthold's clear eye flashed with triumph when he heard this. Then he went with her into the room which contained the scientific apparatus.

But whatever efforts she made, she could not work. Her hands trembled, her eyes grew dim. Her interest in the

matter she was examining declined, other thoughts intervened. She recovered herself with superhuman energy, and crimson flames burned on her cheeks such as would have filled a medical man with alarm. But Leuthold did not notice them. He was so absorbed in the work, that he started as if awakened out of a dream when she fell beside him in a fainting-fit.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEAKNESS OF THE STRONG.

IT was still and empty in the Bergstrasse as Johannes returned from Hochstetten. Those who lived along it were enjoying their siesta, and avoided the scorching beams reflected back in thousandfold fierceness from the white houses. Johannes sat motionless in the carriage, with his hands over his eyes. He did not look up as he heard dogs bark about his wheels—perhaps he did not hear them. The outer world was not to him.

"Halte-la !" called a voice from an equipage standing before his door. *"Parbleu il dort."*

Johannes raised his head : the Countess Worronska was awaiting him.

His carriage drew up. He descended, and the Countess beckoned to him to approach. Contrary to her usage, to-day she did not sit on the box, and hold the reins herself.

"I am glad you have arrived ; I wanted to see you, Professor Möllner, as my note was left unanswered ; and I was just on the point of driving off."

Johannes was embarrassed. He had received the letter, but had not opened it.

"Please give me your arm. Have you a few minutes you could spare me ?"

"I am at your service," said Johannes, gloomily ; and he helped her out of the carriage.

"Will you allow me a few words with you in your house ? Or am I unworthy to enter this temple of science ?"

Johannes opened the door. "My simple house is ill-furnished for the reception of noble guests ; I can scarcely hope it will please you."

"Oh, this is charming," she exclaimed, as she entered the parlour. "I assure you this pleases me far better than my stone halls, where the breath comes chill to a sympathetic bosom."

"I thought that a lady like you could always command the presence of sympathetic friends," said Johannes, not knowing what to say, and speaking only for the sake of saying something.

The Countess looked doubtfully at him. His words were capable of an unpleasant construction. But the thoughtful cloud on his brow satisfied her that he meant no innuendo, but was occupied with other matters. She looked into his eyes, but he involuntarily lowered his lids before her gaze, as one does when shrinking from what offends delicacy. The Countess took it otherwise, and was flattered.

"You call that swarm of giddy flatterers who formerly surrounded me sympathetic friends?" asked she, with bitter scorn.

"If you found no true friend among them, I am sorry; but no really sympathetic man could approach you as long as you were surrounded by that swarm."

The Countess started up from the sofa. "My God! it is an age since I have dismissed them. The way to me was open for every noble-minded man, but none such has come near me, though I have gone half-way to meet him."

Johannes said nothing. This conversation was a martyrdom to him, and it required all his courtesy to keep him from expressing his dislike.

"You are out of temper, Möllner: am I the cause?"

"What a question, Countess! Could I say yes, even if it were so? I must have offended you somehow, or you would hardly have thought me so little given to politeness."

"Well, I cannot say that I have met with excessive civility from you."

"I never offer anything in excess, especially when I know it is not valued," said Johannes, coldly.

The Countess bit her lips. "Do you mean this as a hint?"

"How so? I said nothing that could apply to your conduct."

"Indeed?"

"I am surprised to be obliged to assure you of this," answered Johannes, who was now slowly waking to the suspicion that he had touched a tender point in the Countess's feelings.

"Well, I will take your word for it. Now I wish to offer you something which I know is not valued by you, but which is by others—I mean money." She drew out a pocket-book, and from it counted a number of bank-notes, which she laid on the table. "Look here, I have come to give you 'smart' money for that unfortunate child I ran over. Here are ten thousand roubles. Unfortunately, just at present, I cannot lay my hand on more. Do you think one could offer this to the poor folk as a first instalment?"

"You are most generous, Countess; but it strikes me it would be much better not to place this large sum in the hands of these simple folk. If I might be allowed to advise you, I would recommend you to charge your estate with an annuity for the child, which would save her from falling into want. For as she has lost her arm, she can earn nothing. The poor parents would not know what to do with such a large lump sum."

"Well, will you attend to this matter, and arrange it as you think best. An annuity I could not manage. I might die, and then there would probably arise some difficulty about paying the sum. No, I have written to my steward at St. Petersburg to send me forty thousand roubles more. Then the little creature will have a capital of fifty thousand roubles. With that sum, in Germany, she would be free from all anxiety."

"Countess!" exclaimed Johannes, fixing his eyes with undisguised astonishment on the Worronska. "Do you know what you are doing? You are making presents royally. I do not of course know in what proportion this sum stands to your fortune, but it is my duty to point out to you before I accept such an offering, that it far exceeds the necessities of these poor people."

"Why, goodness! what a fuss about trifles!" exclaimed the Countess, impatiently. "I shall have to economize for a couple of years, that is all, and then shall have covered the outlay. And if I have to deny myself something or other, what is that to the loss to the poor child caused by my carelessness? I would give her more if I had not so many poor relations pulling at my purse-strings, whom I must not disappoint."

"Indeed, Countess, such a fortune in *such* hands is a blessing to the necessitous. To-day for the first time, with deep emotion, I see that this hand can do something else beside hold the reins and crack a whip; I see that it can open with princely liberality, and cheerfully dispense what others anxiously gather. Extend this hand to me that I may impress on it a kiss of profound thankfulness. I have much to apologize for."

"O, Möllner!" exclaimed the beautiful woman, drunk with delight, "All my fortune, myself, and what I possess, would I give for such a look of thanks from your eyes! Möllner, I know what you have to apologize for! You have hitherto despised me, and now you have discovered that there is some good in me. Yes, I have lived a wild life—I confess it. I have not respected the barriers men held up before women, because I did not respect men. Now, I do recognize them, because I have at last found a man, whom I honour fervently, enthusiastically, from whose hand I would gladly accept the rule for my future life, without a question, without a murmur. Möllner, I am capable of something better than giving away a couple of thousand roubles. I can give away, give up myself. If you wished it, if by so doing I might recover your esteem, I would lay aside whip and reins, and take up needle and thread; I would not mount a horse again, and fly over moor and meadow, not care to leave one spot, nor taste of the sparkling spray of life's current, but lay myself down here, here, and clasp your knees, and do penance like Mary Magdalene. I would cast all my wealth before you, and lay aside all my adornments likely to please other eyes than yours. Everything should belong to you, everything that I have

to give; everything that others have burned to acquire; and I would regard it as an act of mercy in you to accept the oblation. But see! here am I setting custom and propriety again at defiance, in offering myself to you, instead of waiting for you to seek me out. But what with others would be overstepping the bounds of propriety is with me a retreat towards them. I must not wait, in pride, till a man like you comes offering his heart. I am sunk so low, that I must beg for regard and love with bitter contrition, and earn it by life-long penance, and not murmur if it be denied me. I feel the disgrace that attends what I am doing, but only by undergoing this disgrace can I recover my lost dignity; only by an act of emancipation can I free myself from emancipation. Believe me, this is no frivolous caprice of mine, but it is the despairing striving of a strayed soul after the redeeming power of true love!"

She could scarcely finish: passion overcame her; and, with her beautiful arms stretched towards him like one in despair, she fell on her knees before him, and burst into wild sobs.

Johannes sought in vain to raise her. He was almost stunned by this volcanic explosion. Into the open wounds, chapped by Ernestine's coldness, poured suddenly the glowing lava of a passion of which he had no suspicion, and the like of which he had never encountered in the temperate zone of German intellectual life. He stood surprised, overwhelmed, bewildered, helpless before this outburst as before some overpowering natural phenomenon. One bitter thought rose in his soul: Where he had asked for love he had found none; where he had never desired or expected it, it overflowed him. The contrast was too harsh—as if dazzled, he hid his eyes, and a deep sigh escaped his breast.

She drew his hand from his face. "Möllner, are these tears for me?"

"For us both."

"Möllner," said she, with deep, flattering earnestness, and her soft, warm fingers closed round his, whilst her glowing eyes hung on his with death agony in their expression. Thus

the handsome woman bent before him, expiating in purgatorial flames her fault that she could not offer the object of her love a virginal heart, cleaving to him as to her saviour, ready to sacrifice herself and a life full of pleasure to him,—to him, a simple German man of learning, wholly ignorant of the arts practised by men in her social sphere for gaining women's affections, one who had never shewn her other than the scantiest courtesy. Thus could a woman love him who could make the largest claims on men; and one to whom he offered his whole soul, one for whom he would devote his life, was ready to reject him in favour of a craze, an absurdity which could never make her happy. His head span. He drew his hands from the clasp of the Countess, and sprang up, struggling for breath. Her head sank in the chair he had left, and she hid her face in her arms, as if waiting for the death-stroke which would smite her head from her shoulders. Now for the first time did he notice her beautiful build, as she lay before him overwhelmed with her anguish. But he only looked at her for a moment, next moment he went from her, and threw open the shutters, that broad daylight might enter and dispel the twilight which had reigned within.

A fresh breeze had risen. He breathed freely. When he came back to the Countess he was calm. Consideration for her, the ruling tenderness of his soul, conquered the repugnance she inspired; and his own rejection by Ernestine softened him to compassion for this despairing, loving woman.

His feeling was genuine and manly. It beamed from his eyes as he raised her head; but she dropped it again, overcome by its magic.

"Oh, Möllner! Do not speak my sentence looking at me thus, or you make it doubly painful for me to die. If you must speak it—must tell me that you cannot love me, then stand aside. Your look wakes the dead again."

"Countess; how can I say what must be said, when you make it so difficult for me to retain my self-possession? I entreat you, dear friend, hear me patiently, and consider what a terrible obligation you have laid on me, forcing me

either to be a dissembler, or to do to you that which is the cruelest thing that can be done to a woman."

The Countess sprang to her feet, and measured him with a look in which anger and pain strove for the mastery. He took her hand, and gently forced her to sit down on the sofa. She yielded almost helplessly.

"Dear Countess, allow me to keep cool, a thing such impulsive, heaven-stirring natures as yours cannot do, and which it therefore the more behoves me to keep, as you have placed the responsibility for your future in my hands. It would not be of much advantage if I were to argue with you, and shew you that you think yourself capable of undertaking heroic sacrifices which are beyond your strength. You would not believe me; for a woman who loves is ready to make every sacrifice. But even in the truest love transformations which are unnatural cannot take place. For a while, no doubt, you might do without pleasures to which you have been accustomed, content with the happiness which takes their place; but, my dear Countess, in time the happiness of love becomes so customary, so habitual, that it loses by degrees the charm of novelty, and falls into a natural condition; and then the suppressed needs of our nature, our idiosyncracies of birth or education, reappear and reassert themselves. Then, if the means of meeting and gratifying them are not forthcoming,—then, in spite of the sincerest love, we feel a craving within which in time will rob us of our conviction that we are happy. This condition, Countess, is unavoidable in marriage, where one side brings sacrifices disproportionate to those made by the other. A woman like you would never be able to accommodate yourself to the humdrum life of a German University town, and would regard yourself as a prisoner, and, in spite of the sincerity of your love, in which I truly believe, you would long to be back again in your old life. One who has not learned from childhood to subordinate self-will to duty, could never acquire this later in life, however sincerely it might be attempted. As soon as your duties towards me became irksome, and that would certainly happen sooner or later, then your condition would be a pitiable one indeed."

"Enough, Professor Möllner!" exclaimed the Countess; "do not trouble to make me doubt my own self. If you loved me you would not be so considerate about my future welfare. If you desired me as I desire you, you would not coldly discuss the length of time our mutual passion would burn before it became a heap of ashes. You would enjoy the present and give the future for it. Oh, you great, proud man, you bear on your brow the brand of slavery to your petty circumstances and surroundings, and do not yourself know it. Your cold lecture does not shame me; for I feel at this moment that I am greater than you."

"You are quite right, my friend! A woman of your beauty and rank need not blush to offer in vain to a man what thousands long to possess. Believe me, if one of us two has cause to be ashamed, it is I, who have been favoured beyond expectation, beyond deserts, and beyond measure—favoured as only Gods can favour—lavishly; favoured in a way of which I am unworthy, and which I can never repay." He took her hand with deep agitation, and her eyes hung burning on his features.

"Oh, Möllner! your heart is softened. I see it is. You do not know what love is. Who is there here to teach you what it is? The half-starved, frost-bitten feeling to which you give that name is sufficient to cover the requirements of your household. The wear and tear is trifling: little is given, little received in exchange. What do you want with more in the hack routine of life? A genuine passion would make a frightful explosion among the common crockery-ware of common life. Only great passions can fan other great passions to ardour; and he who has never known such has never known what life is. A man like you should not timidly stay his ear to the call of passion. Do not withdraw your hand! The moment has come when the decision must be made whether I am to remain here, or go back to Russia. My estates are dilapidated: I have been cheated I must either go home and see to them myself, or sell them. If you will give me the smallest hope, if you will allow me the chance of winning your love, I will get rid of all my Russian estates, and come and live here in the light of your

dear eyes, in the self-devotion and quiet of a cloister, year after year, till you take me to your heart and say, 'You have proved yourself worthy. I will trust you!' And then, then I will spread a heaven about you such as none of your cold, niggardly-minded associates can dream of. A word, Möllner; not a promise, only a hope, and I am your creature!"

Johannes contemplated the fevered woman in her demoniacal splendour and beauty with a strange mixture of admiration and fear, sympathy and aversion. At last he formed a resolution what to do; for he felt that the scene must be brought to an end.

"Countess," he said, not without an effort, for it was distressing to his noble heart to wound a woman. "Countess, I see that I must speak the truth plainly. You have no chance, nothing to hope for. I believe it would be an outrage to say that I *could* not love you, for that would be calling your personal charms in question: What man of flesh and blood could register a vow that he *could* not love you—you a woman perfect from head to foot? I would not myself dare to make such a promise, for I am a man with an eye for beauty like other men. But, Countess, I *will* not love you—and I can swear to perform that which I will or will not do."

He rose, the Countess rose also, she stood opposite him, the picture of despair. "Am I to rest satisfied with this?" she asked, "May I not ask the reason why you will not?"

"Let it be taken as sufficient, when I say that I regard myself as pledged."

"O! to that Hartwich girl!"

Johannes held out his hand threateningly. "Do not name her, Countess! I will not hear her named by your mouth."

"O, indeed! That icy, conceited witch, that phantom, in whose veins is not to be found a drop of hot blood, has robbed me of you! I curse her."

"Curse her not, Countess, or you will lose my scarce won sympathy," exclaimed Johannes, indignantly; "It is not that maiden who stands between me and you: never, never, would I have given you my hand, even if my heart had been

disengaged. Do not drive me to say what should never be uttered by a man to a lady."

"What is that? Do not scruple to empty out the last drop of the goblet. I will not leave till I have heard it."

"Very well, then, as you are so resolved to hear it, the knowledge may cure you in two senses. You may offer, Countess, everything that the earth holds which is precious and blesses, but there is one thing you cannot offer—your womanly honour. And if a goddess were to come down to me and not bring me that jewel, I would send her back to Olympus, and remain below, a poor, solitary man."

A cry followed these words, and then all was still for a while. The Countess Worrónska stood before him turned to a statue, and, perhaps, for the first time in her life, with downcast eyes.

Johannes stepped up to her with feeling, and said gently, "You cannot forgive me for what I have just done to you, and I do not ask you to do so. It is good that things should remain as they are. You will for a while hate me, and then forget me. But, all my life long, I shall think of you with painful regard, for you sought to shew me great kindness, and I repaid it with a wound. Hate me. I deserve nothing better."

"Möllner!" said the beautiful woman, painfully struggling for breath, "I have expiated the faults of my whole life in this one moment of concentrated agony. Farewell! and when you hear that I have fallen back into my old ways, then in the arms of your chaste bride make the sign of the cross, and say to her 'I might have saved that poor soul, but would not do so.'"

Johannes looked sadly at her. "Countess, if the pain of this moment does not make the thought of falling back into your former courses odious to you, then my love, be well assured, would never have saved you. I know but too well what is the fearful responsibility you have laid upon me. I have done what I could. I have spoken the truth to you, and I cannot believe that the knowledge of it will not produce in you good fruits."

"I thank you," said the despairing woman, with bitter

scorn. She fixed one withering look on Johannes, who stood before her calmly, and then she turned in queenly dignity towards the door.

He offered her his arm, to conduct her to the carriage, but she declined it. Her beautiful face was death-like in colour and rigidity. Not another word passed her lips contracted with pain.

He looked after her, as she stepped into the carriage, and buried her face in her hands. He noticed how she trembled in all her body. The carriage dashed away amidst clouds of dust.

Johannes went back into the lonely chamber. "O, Ernestine!" he cried, aloud, as though he thought she could hear him; "Ernestine!"

CHAPTER VII.

KATIE WITH THE SILVER ARM.

How they did talk in the village of Hochstetten! The oldest inhabitants could remember nothing parallel. The great misfortune that had befallen the Kellers had been transformed into a piece of great good luck: Keller and his wife, poor, despised labouring people, had become rich, and would shortly be still better off. It was worth losing an arm to win such a prize. And as Katie had received no further injuries, the money was far too great an indemnity. Many another had suffered more severely, and not a cat had troubled about it, and the sufferer had been sold up for rent and debts, when, from inability to work, he had fallen into difficulties. But this lucky child had a fortune showered down on her, just for losing a trumpery bit of an arm! Why, where was justice flown to? It would have been a satisfaction to the villagers, if they could have consoled themselves with the assurance, that the money came from the devil, and would bring the Kellers no blessing, and that they had better starve than touch the accursed gold—but the vicar had stolen a march on the devil. He persuaded the Kellers to erect with part of the money a beautiful crucifix, and to spend three hundred gulden in masses for their benefactress. This had consecrated the gift, and so the good folk could enjoy the rest of it at ease. Scarce four weeks had elapsed since the accident, when a cross stood by the road side where Katie had been run over. No crucifix in the neighbourhood was to compare with it, and the Kellers held up their heads as proudly when they went past it, as if they had actually set up the Lord Jesus Christ

bodily in the world. The cross was ten feet high, and stood on a pedestal five feet high, on which was cut the inscription: "This cross was erected to the glory of God by Pancras and Columbanâ Keller, Anno Domini, 18.... Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." A little below hung a beautifully painted tablet, on which was written: "Wanderer, stand still and see how wonderfully this promise has been fulfilled in our child." The picture which was to explain these words represented Katie standing with one arm, the other lay on the ground, and from the shoulder spouted a torrent of blood. In the distance was a carriage making off precipitately. Above Katie heaven was open, and the Madonna with the Holy Child on her lap, from a frame of clouds extended to Katie a silver arm.

This exquisite and touching allegory of Katie's misfortune, and subsequent silver blessing, and which had cost the parish clerk,—the village poet—laborious excogitation, had this result,—that the little girl ever after went by the name of 'Katie with the Silver Arm,' though she could never be persuaded to give point to the nick-name by having an artificial member made. Scorn, and mockery, and envy enough gathered about the Kellers, but they did not trouble themselves thereat—they had money in their pockets, and could afford to despise it; and, what was best, they had by means of this money made themselves more highly regarded of the Almighty than the rest.

The Host of the Stag, and the Burgomaster, were reputed the richest men in the village, but neither of them had spent three hundred gulden on the church. The Burgomaster had indeed set up a cross in the meadow, but it was only a "scamped" Christ,—that is to say, a cross with merely head, hands and feet on it, painted, and all the rest left to the imagination. A cheap and scurvy offering, hardly worth acceptance!

Thus, the Kellers were at liberty to enjoy their fortune without anxiety—they knew exactly how they stood with God, and Frau Keller had sprinkled the parcel containing the money, on its reception, with plenty of holy water. This

she had done out of forethought, knowing one could not take precautions enough in these matters. Everything that could be done had been done to drive away the devil, so now a blessing could not fail to rest on it. Katie thought and felt differently from her parents. It grieved her that the children kept away from her, and stared at her, as at a wild beast; that when she sat before her father's door in the sun, the lads screamed out jibes about the silver arm, and pulled the empty sleeve, that hung from her shoulder.

But it grieved her most when once a cripple went by—there are plenty such in places where men battle with the wild forces of nature—and then halted and growled, "It is all very well for you, you are treated like a princess; but we are treated worse than a dog, who is shot when injured. We are allowed to limp and hobble on in our wretchedness, begging for food lest we starve. But then, to be sure, pious people like you are made much of by the good God, so He sent the gentlefolks here to run over you. I had my foot shattered by a great stone I was quarrying, and that made no apologies for what it had done, nor did those for whose house the stone was being cut ask how much human blood was used in building their walls. Well! Everyone has his own luck!"

So saying, the beggar hobbled away on his crutches, and Katie covered her eyes with her one hand, and sobbed bitterly.

"Is that my brave little Katie whom I hear crying?" asked suddenly a well-known voice, and when Katie looked up, she saw Herr Leonhardt approaching, led by his son.

Young Herr Leonhardt was tall and slender, his face gentle, intelligent, and well-featured; he was in every sense a fine young man, such as one imagines the darling of old Jacob to have been. A sacred poetry invested the pair, as with devotion he guided the uncertain steps of the blind father, his eyes resting on the ground, watchful to note every inequality which might cause his father's feet to stumble, and yet it seemed as though he saw clearly all around. He held the light straw hat in one hand, and the blond hair curled round the noble forehead.

Katie's tears ceased as she saw him. He was the only form of light among the coarse peasants ; and however much she might reverence and love his father, the son stood nearer to her in her childish thoughts, for he was young, scarcely twelve years older than herself, and youth binds the young together. She rose and stepped to meet the two.

"Well, Katie, my plucky little maid, who did not cry when her arm was being taken off, what is troubling you now?" asked Walter, as he seated his father on the bench beside her.

"The people scold me because I have been so lucky as to be run over by gentlefolks," said Katie ; "They envy me my good fortune, and no one will now have anything to do with me. But I will not have it so : I will not be so distinguished above other cripples : I will share my riches with them. Sepp needs them much more than I, and deserves them better, and he got nothing for having been lamed by a stone, and he is a great grown-up man. I am only a little silly child whose work is not missed when she does nothing, and yet I have been given such a great lot of money! But I will not keep it all to myself, and my parents shall not do so either ; they are sound and well. I will share with all those who have been crippled like me."

"But, my dear Katie," said Herr Leonhardt, moved, "You are too generous towards those who have been unkind to you. If you were to share what you have with all the cripples in the parish, you would have little left. But if Heaven has ordained that you should be rich and they poor, you may accept the mysterious judgment of Providence without scruple. When you have got the land which will be purchased for you with the sum promised, you may help the necessitous by giving them work suited to their capabilities on it. Till that happens, lay aside a small sum as a weekly contribution to them ; that will be far better than pouring a large sum into the pockets of rough men, who would squander it in idleness, drunkenness, and play."

"Yes, I should like that ; but mother won't allow me. She does not let me have a kreuzer to give away to the poor."

"Does your father allow this?" asked Walter, who observed the child with pleasure.

"O! he is at work all day long, in our new field, and does not trouble himself about these matters. Mother manages the money, and when she says—'So it shall be,'—he daren't say a word."

"But this does not match with your parents' generosity towards the Church."

"Yes, I told my mother, I had rather give some of the money to the poor folk, that she spent on the vicar and the mason for masses and crucifix, but she told me I was a little goose. The money was given to the good God, and it was better to give to Him, and much more likely to turn out profitably than to give to men, for God is much mightier than they, and more able to reward those who do something for Him."

Herr Leonhardt turned with a gentle smile to his son. "Does not one word describe the degradation of piety? These people look to God only for what they can get. They regard their Creator as a creature who may be bought over to their interests; whose protection is to be gained by a *douceur*, and when they have thus bribed Him, they think they are quit of all other Christian obligations to their fellow-men. O holy—no, not holy—unholy simplicity!"

"My dear father," said Walter, "it is the old story of 'Indulgences' in another form. 'Tetzel was turned out, but Tetzels remain,' may well be said; for there will be Tetzels as long as men look to money as their highest aim, and do not think it beneath the honour of the Almighty to take Him into partnership in their business. The noble theory of ancient sacrifice lies at the bottom of this. Poly-crates cast his ring into the sea to appease the gods; the Christian spends a heavy sum in a cross for the same purpose. But the Greek grew pale when the gods returned his gift, by the fish bringing him back his ring; whereas the selfish greed of our times regards a sacrifice as so much capital invested, and looks to a rich per-centage coming from it."

The young man laughingly ran his hand through his light

luxuriant hair. His father sadly bowed his bald head towards earth, and thought how true was what his son had said, and how far men were still from a right knowledge of the relations between God and man. Katie looked at both with astonishment, much as if they had been speaking in her presence a foreign tongue. All about was still, for the children's parents were at work in the fields. A pair of pigeons were pecking up the crumbs of Katie's bread she had been eating for her tea. In the brook before the house fat ducks were paddling, dipping and shaking their tails.

Steps approached rapidly.

"There is our friend, Möllner," said the old man, listening. "I know his step from all others."

"Yes, father Leonhardt, here he is," said the new arrival. "God bless you all!" He walked up to the pleasant little party. Some geese fled before him, shocked, anxious, but preserving their dignity to the end, for it never occurred to them to step aside. Not they—they maintained the middle of the road, and Johannes was obliged to give way to them to pass and reach his friends.

"Look you, Professor," said the young man merrily, "how proud those stupid creatures are at having held their own against you. They are looking across at you with supreme self-complacency. They think that they drove you out of the road. So it is all the world over, wise men make way for fools so as not to be involved in their follies, and the latter cackle out their triumph as if they were the conquerors."

Johannes smiled. "My dear Walter, what has made you take up these ideas? Are you thinking of writing a new primer for your scholars stuck full of moral sentiments?"

"Such a book would not be amiss among such folks," answered Walter, shaking the Professor's offered hand.

Möllner seated himself on the bench, and took Katie on his lap. "You would like it, would you not, Katie, if Herr Walter composed a new primer for you?"

"It is quite possible, dear Walter, that this might be a useful work," said Herr Leonhardt, seriously. "Little mat-

ters must not be despised, if God does not place it in our power to attempt great ones."

"Yes, father," laughed the young man, "but a primer to go down here ought to have under the letter H—

"That Hartwich is a witch, full well
Each godly Christian man can tell!"

Herr Leonhardt secretly nudged the inconsiderate speaker, and he looked startled towards Möllner, who was gazing broodingly before him.

"You must not make fun of the Fräulein from the castle," said Katie, as she laid her wan face against Johannes' beating heart. "Mother was lamenting to-day that I looked as pale and strange as the young lady, and said that I must pray to God to take the wicked spell off me which the Fräulein had cast over me. That made me unhappy; for it is no fault of hers that I am pale. She is so kind, how could she have bewitched me?"

Johannes pressed the child to him, without speaking.

"She certainly is kind, and does no one any harm," said Herr Leonhardt. But his son broke in with youthful impetuosity, "She is a saint! a saint whose footprints these people are unworthy to kiss."

Johannes pressed his bearded lips on the child's head, and said nothing.

"Where are you, Herr Professor?" asked Leonhardt, faintly, and laid his hand on the shoulder of Johannes.

"Now to the purpose of my coming here, dear friend," said Möllner. "Four weeks have elapsed since I saw you last, and I have been quite uneasy at my long absence. But I did not wish to see you again till I had collected sufficient evidence to crush the uncle; for I must be prepared for every sort of opposition from him. To-day, by the help of our dear old friend, Heim, I have been put on the trail of Gleissert's rogueries. And when I consider that the information I have received to-day fits in with your statement that most of his letters are addressed to Unkenheim, I fancy I have a hold on him. And yet—yet I do

not know what I ought to do, whether to write to Ernestine and warn her by letter, or see her myself. The sight of me will be, must be, painful to her."

"As far as I remember, you told me that she begged you not to desert her," said Herr Leonhardt.

"She did so, my friend, in a moment of agitation. But how do I know what her present views and feelings are? She now never visits you without first sending to make sure that I am not here, and never comes without Gleisert."

"The uncle is at the bottom of this," said Walter. "You have no idea, Professor, how he watches and keeps guard round her. Since I have been admitted to work in the laboratory I have not, on one single occasion, seen her alone—the devil is always at her elbow. She only got permission for me to be allowed into the castle by insisting on it peremptorily. Frau Willmers says that the struggle lasted three days before she conquered. Fräulein Ernestine was so determined, that the uncle was forced in the end to give way. It is high time that something should be done for her, unhappy young lady. Since the completion of her last undertaking she has been thoroughly exhausted. If this goes on much longer it will kill her."

"I know this well enough," said Johannes, with a deep sigh; "but what can I do? Her heart is unassailable; her mind is not to be turned from its purposes. My only hope is in separating her from that scoundrel."

"But I think it best you should go and see her yourself. She is growing weaker every day," said Walter.

"Yes; I feel that by her hands," added Leonhardt. "They have become thin, cold, and damp, like those of a dying person. Oh, Professor, it goes to my heart when she touches me with them; and I seem to see how she is suffering; for I know that only thus the hands can feel of those who have gone through great bodily and mental agonies."

Johannes put the child by his side, and covered his face; but he could not hide from the blind eyes of the school-master what was passing within.

"Why this pride, dear Sir—this determination to master

a pain which is so natural? Go to her; it may prove a mercy to her."

"Well, I will write her a couple of lines," said Johannes, "and will ask her if it will be a comfort or a distress to see me for a moment. My God! I have no wish but to do her good! You, dear young friend, Walter, will take the note and put it in her hands, so that it may not be suppressed by her uncle, will you not? I hope she will commit the reply to you also."

"In God's name, let us go home," said Leonhardt, "so that you may write."

The gentlemen rose.

Then Katie caught Johannes by the coat. "You, Herr Professor, will not find the Fräulein at the castle to-morrow."

"Why not, Katie?" asked Johannes, who had no notion that the child had followed what they had been saying.

"You may believe me. Frau Willmers, up yonder, passed me to-day, and whispered to me to let the gentlemen know privately, if they came here, that to-night the Fräulein was leaving, never to come back again; but that I was not to betray her, or she would lose her place. If the Herr Professor did not come, I was to tell the Herr Teacher, so that he might send a messenger to town for the Professor. Frau Willmers cried bitterly, and complained that she did not dare go near the school-house, lest a certain person should see her, who is always watching the Fräulein."

"Katie!" exclaimed Johannes, "you cherub! The young lady is leaving to-night, and I, blind fool, would have let her slip away unless you had opened my eyes! Is this really true?"

"It is, I am sure. I have told you the very truth."

Johannes lifted the child and hugged her passionately. "Child, tell me, what can I do for you to reward you? Say, have you a wish that I can gratify?"

"Oh, dear Herr Professor! I wish that you would speak to my parents to give me a little money for the poor. Do, do ask them! Then I shall not be teased any more about my silver arm. I will give them some little happiness, too."

If this is not done, I shall be avoided like the Fräulein; and I would not have that for any money."

"I can quite believe that you feel this, dear little child; and I promise you that I shall so secure the money that is coming to you that your parents will not be able to appropriate it, and you will be able to employ it as Herr Leonhardt shall advise."

"Oh, that will be delightful! That will be perfect!" rejoiced Katie, and she kissed a corner of Johannes' coat. "Herr Walter!" she exclaimed, in her joy, "you will help me to find out all the sick people, and tell me how much to give each, won't you?"

"Yes, Katie darling, we will," said Walter, well pleased.

Johannes gave the child some silver. "There, my pet; give that to the next beggar that goes by, if it affords you satisfaction. Farewell, all of you. I must not lose a minute; for now I must take a decisive step. God be with you!" He pressed Leonhardt's hand, and hastily strode towards the castle. "What can have passed yonder between the uncle and the Fräulein that this has been decided?"

"Father Leonhardt," said Katie, "you must not betray me, and I will tell you something."

"Well, what, child?"

"The guardian yonder is a very bad man."

"Why, all the world knows that, Katie!" said Walter.

"Yes; but only fancy! When it is dark he examines the contents of the letter-box."

"What do you say?"

"My father saw him do it; but he has threatened, if I tell, to lock me up for three days."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Herr Leonhardt. "How did your father find this out?"

"He told mother, and I did not ought to hear; but I did. As he was out one night last week, watching because of the theft of grapes, he heard someone steal by the school-house, and he hid himself, thinking to catch the thief. Then he recognised Herr Gleissert, and saw that he was busy at the letter-box. Father crept up closer, and clearly saw the

gentleman put something long in at the hole, and draw out the letters. Then he lighted a match, holding his hat before it that none might see. By the light of the match he read the addresses on the envelopes, and then put the letters back into the box, with the exception of one, which he kept. Then he went back to the castle. Father said at one time he thought of seizing him; but he did not venture to do so, not knowing what weapons he might have about him. And he would not denounce him lest some mischief might befall himself; for those people up at the castle had dealings with the devil."

"What is not this scoundrel ready to do?" exclaimed Herr Leonhardt, anxiously.

Walter laughed. "Why, father, this is serving me out for reading the addresses on his letters when the postman fetches them."

"No; that is quite another matter," said Leonhardt, gravely. "But I think our friend ought to know of this before he reaches the castle. Run, Walter, run! you have active legs; and catch him up, and tell him what you know."

"Yes, father, I will catch him, never fear. You remain sitting here till I return." And away he sped like a stag.

Herr Leonhardt felt for Katie. "Child, are you there?"

"Yes, father Leonhardt."

"Katie, to-day you have repaid me for all the love that I have borne you." He passed his hand over her thin face. "I cannot see you any more. You tell me you are much altered, and it seems so. But before my mind's eye I see only the mischievous little brown eyes and rosy apple cheeks; but I see also the little mouth stained with whortleberries. Katie! you have not told lies since then, have you?"

"No, father Leonhardt, on my word I have not; and I never will again. Now I am the richest child in the place, mother says; and I will also be the best, and thank the good God, as you say I ought, with good words. And do you know, now that I cannot fold my hands in prayer, I feel as if I must pray more in my heart. I want some-

thing. Before it was as if I held the good God between my hands, and kept Him there fast, and made Him listen till I had said my say, and then let Him go again. But now I cannot do this, so I feel forced to pray more earnestly, as though to draw Him towards me, and keep Him fast by me by my earnestness, as long as I want to pray."

"Good child! The Lord is ever present by you. Where would He rather be than in such a pure child's heart? Katie, you are a flower on the blind man's path! Do you know what I mean?"

Katie laid her little head on Leonhardt's knee. "I think you mean that you love me."

"Yes, my child; and that on my path there are not many joys like that which I have from you."

"But, father, you have got Walter: you must love him better than me."

"God bless him; he is my staff in the night! He is the best I have on earth."

"Father Leonhardt, when I am big I will marry Walter; and then we can all live together."

"What! What has put that idea into your head?"

"Why, mother said I was so rich now that I could marry just whom I liked; and I will have Walter, and no one else—no one else."

"But perhaps he won't want to have you," said Herr Leonhardt, smiling.

"Oh, he will; I am sure of that," answered the child, with confidence.

"Oh, holy, holy simplicity!" sighed the old man, and laid his hands in benediction on the little head. And as he thus sat silent, and looking out into the night, all suddenly was clear about him. From the gloom emerged pillars of a church, and through lofty windows fell sunbeams on a young couple kneeling before an altar. They were surrounded by a circle of relations, and amongst them was a grey blind father, and at his side an aged mother weeping for joy. And the young couple were beautiful; the bridegroom blond, bearded, manly,—the bride, full of sweet maiden shame. In her great open eyes were tears of de-

votion; but the little charming mouth was slightly tinted blue, as though she had been recently eating whortleberries. "What! on the wedding-day to go picking berries!" exclaimed the congregation. And then the organ began to sound, and the whole church took up a glorious hymn. The bride held out to her beloved a hand—the left hand, indeed; but she held faster with that than do others with both—she held fast for life.

And now the marriage was over, and the two stepped out into the joyous spring morning. And a crowd of well-known faces came round—poor deformed, crippled beings, but not so revolting to sight as of yore. They wore fresh suits of clothes, and they tossed up their caps and cried, "Long live the happy pair! Since they have been in the village, none starve and shiver. Long live Doctor Walter Leonhardt! Long live Katie with the silver arm!"

Oh, peaceful, shining picture! illumining the soul of the blind man—blessed dream of the future, hovering before the old man who stands on the edge of the grave, spun out of the chatter of a child!

"Father Leonhardt! why are you smiling," asked the little girl.

"Because I have seen something very beautiful!"

"I thought you could see nothing at all?"

"Nothing that *is*, my child; but, better still—I see that which *will be*."

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFLICT.

ERNESTINE sat at her writing-table, arranging papers and books that were to be packed. Her uncle helped her with trembling impatience. From time to time she pressed her head in her hands, overcome by weakness.

"I do not see how we can possibly get away to-day unless you exert yourself more," said Leuthold, urgently.

"I am doing my utmost, but I am so weak that I hardly know whether I shall be able to leave to-night."

"It is inexplicable to me how you can give way now. You never were like this before. You had formerly such power of self-control, such strength of will as would have done honour to a man, and now—it is really too provoking!"

"You torment me, uncle," exclaimed Ernestine, and she threw several books into the packing-case near her. "You will not believe me when I tell you that I feel myself now much worse than before. It is my own wish to leave this place, why then should I not hasten my departure as much as I *can*?"

Her uncle looked at her sideways with a smile.

"You deceive yourself, my child. It is not your will but your caprice which is driving you hence. Caprice is the child of accident, and accident may alter its direction."

"I know of no accident likely to change this 'caprice' as you call it. Nothing is likely to happen either to-day or to-morrow which would alter my determination. What makes you fear delay? No one knows of my departure, and so no one can make my heart heavy with remonstrances. I have not told the good old Leonhardt, and Willmers knows it

to-day for the first time. Could I do more to assure you that I was in earnest?"

Leuthold again looked at her with a sarcastic smile. He knew well enough that Ernestine had only kept her departure so close a secret because she felt that she had not strength to withstand certain friendly objections that might be raised. Therefore he trembled lest an untoward accident should upset her resolution and disturb his plans. Her staying or going was of the last importance to him. During the four weeks past since Ernestine's return, he had directed his influence wholly towards making her ready to leave the place and country. She must not see again the man who had made such a powerful impression upon her. *Now*, it was of more importance than ever that she should not fall in love; for if she were now to think of marrying and demand her fortune,—he would be lost. His ample experience had enabled him to secure a situation in a large chemical manufactory in New York, through an American agent. He made Ernestine a proposal to lecture in a scientific society there, for a handsome honorarium. The fact of her having won a prize for an essay in a German University sufficed to give her a name in America, and Leuthold did his utmost to puff her as a female prodigy. In the present critical position of his affairs it was of importance that he should obtain for her a situation in which she could earn her livelihood, so that she might not be a burden to him.

If the lectures did not answer she must practice as a female doctor. But of this he did not breathe a word. He filled her mind with exaggerated and impossible results which he represented as sure to follow her lecturing. For a woman fired with ambition, his representations were irresistible. When he shewed her some American newspapers with mention of her in the inflated and exaggerated style usual in America, she was overcome by her excitement, her blood burned as in a fever, and raced through her veins. She saw a future before her such as had never fallen to the lot of a woman. She saw herself in a magnificent hall of vast proportions in New York, with an audience of men listening breathlessly to her words. She saw herself ad-

mired as the wonder of her sex. The most secret dreams of her pride were about to be realized; the seed of her solitary toil was at last to shoot into publicity; the world would ring with the report of the marvels that a woman could do.

And yet the decision gave her pain. It took her long before she could persuade herself to sign her name to the agreement, and no work on which had been expended the unflagging labour of days and nights had cost her so much as writing these few letters.

Möllner's stern, handsome face, like Banquo's ghost waving Macbeth from the throne, had risen before her and frightened her from undertaking this new honour. It was to her as if she were doing him a wrong—and at last, in her agony of doubt, she wrote to him privately. She told him all honestly; she asked his advice; she did not disguise from him that she could not take such a decisive step likely to affect her whole life, without his blessing. Why this letter never reached its destination none knew save Leuthold and Katie's father.

Day after day passed, and Ernestine waited in vain for an answer. She awaited a decision of life or death to her. No sleep refreshed her burning lids, only as much food as was necessary to sustain life passed her lips. She ate out her heart in longing for a word, a last word from Möllner, and it did not come. She was no longer of value to him sufficient to induce him to dip his pen in ink; since she had refused his offer he would have no more communications with her. He had conquered his pain, and had given her up—so speedily!

And the greater her longing had been for a letter or a visit, so much the greater was the irritation, the indignation with which she resented his refusal to answer her. Whenever she went to her writing-table she saw there the agreement about the lectureship, inviting her with all the fascinating pictures it conjured up. Why now should she hesitate? Why delay?—And so she had signed the contract.

Now that her resolution was taken nothing must be allowed to shake it. She would revenge herself by remaining inexorably lost to him, by leaving him without a farewell,

that the next he might hear of her might be the rumour of the fame she had won in the New World.

She did not trust Willmers, knowing how she gossiped. Only on the last day of Ernestine's residence in the castle of Hochstetten, was the good woman informed of the approaching departure, in order that she might see to the disposal of Ernestine's moveables, and then follow as quickly as possible. For Leuthold desired before sailing to say farewell to Gretchen, and he had induced Ernestine, for safety's sake, to accompany him, as he was determined not again to lose sight of her.

She wrote a sad, painful farewell to Leonhardt, and begged him to take charge of her books and apparatus till she should send for them. She did not know yet where she would finally settle, and therefore was not likely to require them again for some considerable time. Thus, delicately, she veiled to these sensitive men, the costly present she made of things which Walter needed for the prosecution of his studies.

Only when they were under way did she intend to let her uncle know that the physiological works and instruments which he had placed under Willmer's charge to be sold, were not to be sold, but given away. He would never have consented, for Ernestine began to notice with surprise how anxious he was about realizing money. Willmers had been made to promise not to give the letter to Herr Leonhardt till after her departure. Thus everything had been thought of, everything considered except one thing—Ernestine's health. She was so little accustomed in her pride to trouble herself about that, that she had not regarded her growing indisposition, the natural results of superhuman nervous excitation. This day she could scarce hold herself upright, and the thought of having to undertake so long a journey began to distress her.

She sat thus before her uncle the picture of exhaustion. He looked at her with doubt,—would she be able to hold up till he got her on board ship? If she fell ill there, it would be only sea-sickness, from which all suffer. If she died—? It would be well for all. He would bury her in the tossing

ocean, and with her his hate, his fear, his crimes. The waves which would carry off her body would wash him clean from disgrace. O this thought!—it was immeasurably lovely, like the wide sea which already spread in fancy before his eager eyes.

"Uncle, do not look at me in that strange fashion," said Ernestine, "one would think you were wishing me no good."

Leuthold smiled. "Your nerves must be weak, my child. How long is it since my face has seemed strange to you?"

Ernestine did not answer. She was wrapping a book in paper, to go into the box.

"Are you going to take that old fairy book with you?" asked Leuthold, ironically.

"Yes," was the curt answer.

"Very well, then. Have you a doll as well you would like packed up?"

Ernestine started up. "Uncle, I have already told you once that I will not tolerate this."

"I beg your pardon; but such babyishness deserves only a jest. Has the book any other value for you? You need not blush. I suppose it is a remembrance of the Knight of the Oak, of Möllner. Then, of course, it must go with us."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Ernestine, and she took from him the book he was about to lay with the others. "You know how to pollute with your mockery everything that I hold precious. Leave the book out. I will give it to little Katie."

"And when Professor Möllner comes to see her, he will find the book in her hands, and it will touch him to see how truly his deserted friend had preserved her childish recollections of him. He will find an oak-leaf between the pages, and will take it as a silent farewell greeting, and will shed for you a tear of compassion—how edifying."

"Uncle! if I thought this, I would burn the book rather than give it to Katie."

"I think this is the very best thing you can do with it. This self-opinionated man is not deserving of your recollection. I should like to see it trampled out like everything else that is unworthy of you. It has indeed exasperated me

for some time, though I have not spoken about it, to see how indifferent he has grown towards you. A woman like you is not to be given up like a piece of goods which you cannot bargain down to your price. He never did love you, or he would never have begun with imposing conditions for a union, as though he were doing you an honour in stooping to pick you up. Believe me, I know the world and men. He was in the greatest embarrassment, for he had morally bound himself to offer you his hand."

Ernestine shuddered.

Leuthold went on. "I do not know how you behaved yourself towards him; but with your inexperience and the inclination you evidently shewed him—do not deny it—it is certain that to some extent you must have offered yourself to him."

Ernestine bit her lips, and her eyes fell.

"The very fact that you accompanied him to his house, alone, without any further acquaintance with him; without any invitation from his mother; must have assured him that you were over head and ears in love with him, and he had the sense of propriety to wish to remove the stain which your want of consideration had cast on your honour, by making you his wife. I will not for a moment dispute that at first he meant honourably and truly by you, but his feelings towards you seem to have been rather those of a friend than of a lover, and your being accidentally thrown together by that affair in the village, and your unmistakable advances towards him forced him into the latter position. Who knows but that now he may be recollecting the way in which you obtruded yourself on him, and bè blessing his stars he has got out of the mess so cheaply. But like a lackadaisical codfish you dandle and ogle everything that reminds you of him, and are prepared to carry across the sea with you, as a dear relic, the trifling present' he made you out of pity when you were an ugly hoiden. Ernestine! what is the matter with you? For heaven's sake control yourself. Is it worth making a fuss about such a trifle? Why, you are getting into quite a habit of fainting."

He raised her pale head, and fanned it.

She looked at him dimly, and then thrust him from her with unmistakable aversion. Leuthold let her alone. This was the first time she had allowed him to speak to her of Möllner, and he had taken advantage of his opportunity to pour into her soul the surest antidote to love. He might now let it work at leisure.

Ernestine walked up and down the room. Her stride, her bearing, was queenly. She seemed all at once to have grown an inch. Her uncle might be right—she hated him for it—but still he might be right. What must that man, what must his mother, think of her, that she had flung herself into his arms? This was why she was so disparagingly treated by the mother—this was why the son imposed such cold conditions on her. She thought over what Johannes had said. He had spoken words of stern warning or sharp rebuke, and when he had addressed her kindly and lovingly it had been as though he stood to her in the light of a father or of a judge. Not even when he offered her his hand, had he laid aside his usual self-possession. Yes, even when his eyes filled with tears, it was the pity of a noble heart for a lost soul that elicited those drops, not the anguish of rejected love. And she? She remembered every affectionate word, every friendly glance she had accorded Johannes, and all seemed to her now excessive; seemed beside her former cold composure as immodest, and as a thrusting of herself on the notice and attention of Johannes, which he could not mistake. Yes! perhaps he despised her for it. And she had pushed her advances to the point of writing to him. The only thing upon which she could plume herself, her refusal to become his wife, was obliterated by this last act of forwardness. He must have regarded this as an attempt to re-open her approaches, and he naturally put it aside with dignified silence. She would have liked to fly the world to escape the thought of him. Every recollection of him sent the red of shame over her face. To be far away, away across the sea, was now all at once her sole burning desire. She halted as she passed the fireplace, and beckoned to Leuthold. "Burn the book!" These were the first words that passed her lips.

Quick as the breath from the mouth, Leuthold was at her side to take it, and in another moment the book was on fire. Ernestine stood by, and watched the flame lick the cover, the boards curl and roll up in the heat. The draught, with invisible fingers, turned the crackling pages of the burning book, and as each opened the flame devoured the contents like an eager reader. Ernestine would not turn her eyes from the sad scene. She saw the headings of tales which had become dear to her, gleam luridly and vanish. The Snow Queen, cold and ice-gleaming, the Little Mermaid, in her watery element—all disappeared in fire.

Now the oak-leaf crackled and became ash,—that oak-leaf she had once plucked from the dear old tree. Then the whole book fell apart, and flamed from all sides. The loose pages fluttered in the waving flame. There—there—one title more—unmistakably distinct—the Swan! The paper flared up and fell. The swan, the beautiful swan was burnt. Never more would he unfold his wings before her—he could not soar like a phoenix from these flakes. The fire went out. The little enchanted world lay in ashes, and a few sparks sadly crawled about them as seeking the corpses of their relatives, the dead forms of light.

Ernestine walked away—she felt as if the flames had singed the wings of her soul. She stood with bowed head, like the god with the extinguished torch—and wept.

Leuthold did not disturb her. He knew that he must now spare her.

Then, all at once, the door opened, and Frau Willmers announced timidly, “Professor Möllner!”

Leuthold started up as though shot through the heart by an arrow. Ernestine leaned against the chimney, or she would have fallen.

“How do you dare to announce any one now, how could you——?” he gasped, out of his senses with fear and rage.

“You may do what you will with me, Doctor, I can’t help it. The gentleman said positively he would not leave the spot till I had announced him.”

“Tell the gentleman that we cannot receive him.”

Frau Willmers looked hesitatingly at Ernestine, who remained motionless and pale as death.

"Well! what are you waiting for?" asked Leuthold, with a threatening look in his countenance.

"I am off, I am off," answered the woman, and departed.

Ernestine took a step forward as though to follow her. But she recovered herself. A storm raged within her, almost robbing her of consciousness. Her hard heart was nigh breaking at letting him go thus. But no, she regretted her own weakness. He had delayed answering her appeal so long, that it was evident he came now under a sense of duty only, and reluctantly. She would, she must show no sign of weakness.

Leuthold stood at the door. He listened with bated breath to hear Johannes depart. But to his inexpressible dismay Frau Willmers returned.

"The gentleman will not go," she said with covert pleasure; "he says that he has come to visit the gracious Fräulein and not the Herr uncle; and that as the Fräulein has ceased to be legally a ward these many years, she must decide for herself whether she will see him or not."

Ernestine listened startled. "What, what is that?" Her eye rested inquiringly on her uncle, and noted with astonishment the deadly fear which was painted on his face. "Uncle!" she asked again, "what is the meaning of this? Give me an answer."

"Don't listen to this idiotic twaddle. The man is either a liar, or——"

"Say that to his face, if you have the courage," interrupted Ernestine, in flaming wrath. "Ask the gentleman to step in!" she said authoritatively.

Willmers hastened forth.

"Ernestine!" exclaimed Leuthold distractedly, "this before me!"

"I will know what this means about my wardship!" said the maiden, and fixed a look on Leuthold before which his eyes fell.

Möllner entered. He measured Leuthold with a look of perfect self-reliance and profound contempt; then he bowed

towards Ernestine, without looking at her. He wished to spare her, and allow her time to recover herself. She misunderstood him, and thought it was coldness, and responded with coldness.

A long pause ensued.

Leuthold endeavoured to assume the appearance of ease, and broke the silence. "May I ask, after what has passed between my niece and you, what more you can want with us, Sir?"

"That I will tell the Fräulein presently. And if you will favour me with your presence during our interview, I shall be obliged."

"Well then, be so good as to take a seat," said Leuthold, as he offered Johannes a chair. "Only I must request you urgently to be as short as possible, as we are on the point of leaving."

"Which you will not do, Doctor."

"Sir! Are you better acquainted with our intentions than we are ourselves?"

Johannes sat down after Ernestine had seated herself, and answered with simple emphasis, "With your intentions, no, —but I know that I shall prevent their being put into execution by obtaining, if necessary, your arrest."

Leuthold was silenced for a moment, then he smiled across at Ernestine, who sat as if turned to stone. "This is your worthy knight of the oak! What a pity that we do not live in the days when might made right, and when every doughty robber could capture the honest man and clap him in a tower."

"O no, Doctor, a simple man of science has no wish for such ventures of knight-errantry. I choose safer and more legitimate measures. If you venture the attempt to make off, the police stationed here will, by my orders, take you into custody, unless you first explain your affairs in connexion with Fräulein von Hartwich to my satisfaction. If you can do that, then you may slink away when you like; I shall have no more interest in you."

"Professor," exclaimed Leuthold, "I can only suppose that some persons have been slandering me to you, and I

must request you to come with me to my own room, that we may not offend the ears of this young lady with our explanations, for her health demands the greatest consideration."

"If the Fräulein is strong enough to journey to New York, as Frau Willmers tells me is intended, then she is quite able to hear what we have to say to one another. But first of all, Ernestine, I ask you, is it of your own free will and consent that you are leaving your native land?"

"Yes," she answered, so faintly as scarcely to be audible.

"Well, you are mistress of your will. But before you carry out your purpose you must *know* what you intend doing. As yet you do not know, and I have come here to tell you. If you do go with Herr Gleissert, you link your fate with a rogue."

Ernestine and Leuthold sprang up. Johannes also rose; he leaned his hand on the table, and let his great eyes rest on them both, without the lashes quivering.

Leuthold was not able to utter a word. Ernestine lost all power to speak at the sight of the noble form of his opponent.

Johannes went on. "You will ask me to produce proofs of this frightful charge. I have received them this morning; here they are." He drew forth some documents from his pocket-book. He unfolded one of these. Leuthold glanced at it, staggered back, and sank into a chair.

"Did you write this?" asked Johannes, extending the paper to Ernestine, "I must beg you to read it."

"No," she answered with undisguised astonishment, as she ran her eye through the contents.

"And have you signed a deed before a notary, the contents of which you did not know?"

"Never!" was the firm answer.

Möllner breathed freely, "Now you see, this is my proof, which is sufficient to consign your uncle to jail, for he has been guilty of forgery."

Ernestine made a motion as though she would hear no more.

But Johannes would not be stopped thus. "From your first letter to Heim, and from what you said to my mother,

which she faithfully reported to me, I saw clearly, Ernestine, that you supposed yourself still a ward. And according to the law of the land so you should be, for here a woman is of age at twenty-four, and you are only twenty-two. But I know from Heim, who helped to draw up your father's will, that you were declared independent at eighteen. Your uncle concealed this from you. Why he did so you shall know later."

"Then for four years I have been legally mistress of my acts!" exclaimed Ernestine, in the liveliest indignation. "Uncle, is this so, and you have held me under restraint like a child?"

"Further, he has kept back your fortune from you. Here is a copy of your father's will, and you will see from it that this man when you were eighteen withdrew your property from chancery and took charge of it himself. You were quite unable to make use of your means, for he kept you uninformed about them, as he had about your wardship. But your uncle has been employing your capital, which he drew out of chancery by means of this document to which your signature has been forged. No suspicion attached to the deed, for it was drawn up in proper legal form by an Italian notary, and witnessed by two persons who swore to your identity. It was only when I was suspicious that your uncle was purposely keeping you in the dark about your relation to him, and declared my suspicion before the legal authorities, that I was allowed to have a copy of the deed which I produce for your consideration. You have established the fact of a forgery. It now rests with me to spare or punish this gentleman, and this must depend on the result of what takes place between us. That I permit myself to think of sparing him arises from no consideration for him, but for your feelings, Ernestine, which would suffer at the disgrace of your uncle." He turned to Leuthold, "I ask you, Sir, what have you done with the money which you have kept back from your niece?"

"Before I answer you, Sir," answered Leuthold, with recovered composure, "allow me to ask you how long is it since you have abandoned physiology, in which you so dis-

tinguished yourself, for jurisprudence, in which you will I fear, meet with failure?"

"I did this," said Johannes coolly, "as soon as I felt myself bound in honour to rescue a young, misguided lady from destruction, by the weapons of the law, and I think, Sir, that I understand enough of my newly-acquired science to be able to unveil your rascalities. But, without evasion, answer me, what have you done with the fortune you fraudulently acquired?"

"And I ask you, Professor, what legal right have you to demand this account of me?"

Johannes looked collectedly at Leuthold, "Very well, then, if you will only answer before a magistrate, I am ready to postpone an explanation, and to put the matter into the hands of the police. I leave you time to consider which you prefer."

"At all events, I shall have less to fear from a court than from a maniac who bursts into a family, in defiance of custom and decency, sets the rights of privacy at naught, like a foot-pad who puts his knife to the throat of unarmed travellers, and shouts, 'Your money or your life!'"

"Uncle," said Ernestine, "I forbid you in my presence insulting this honourable friend. If you can clear yourself of the dreadful charge, do so with dignity. You prove nothing by abuse."

"What, you also, Ernestine—you also take sides against me?" exclaimed Leuthold, bitterly.

"I take no sides. On the contrary, I tremble lest the man who has brought me up should prove a criminal. But, for all that, I will not, I cannot, screen you from the discovery of the truth. You have yourself taught me to subordinate every emotion of the heart to cold reason, and to go to the bottom of things at the cost of dispelling the most sacred illusions. Now, grim teacher, reap what you have sown."

"Good. I am prepared to answer *you*, when you call me to task. There is one point in which I have erred, and that is, the extension of my guardianship over you beyond the term imposed by your feeble-minded father.

That I can and will excuse; for every honourable judge acquainted with you will acknowledge that it would have been most unconscientious in me to have left you to your fate at eighteen, unripe and unexperienced. It was an arbitrary proceeding, I admit; but it was well intended—it was done out of love and anxiety for you. The thought that you would live without me, and I without you, was unendurable to me, unimaginable by me. This was the only injustice I did you, the only thing for which you can blame me. As for the accusations made by this gentleman, I despise to answer them. My life lies open before all eyes: it is passed in contemplative calm, in quiet scientific study, in which happiness—alas, that it has been disturbed!—I have reared you! I regard your threats of legal proceedings with indifference, Sir! Your heated fancy is not in a condition to be convinced by any explanation I could offer. You are bent on bringing the matter before a court of law, and that will establish my innocence. Why, then, need I waste words on you?”

Johannes smiled. “As to the first part of your very successful speech, I reserve my answer. But I cannot withhold from asking you, in reference to the second part, how you can dare to talk of innocence after your niece has, in my presence, denied her having had any hand in these documents now under dispute, and that you have been convicted of forgery?”

“Yes, Sir; there is no doubt that a forgery has been committed; but who is to convict me of having been the forger? I have a friend in Italy whom I trusted unguardedly, and to whom I unfortunately confided more of my family relations than was advisable; and, knowing this, I very much fear that he may have succeeded, with the help of some rogue of a lawyer, to step into the place of Ernestine and me, and——” He shrugged his shoulders, as if unwilling to complete his terrible charge.

Johannes smiled almost with pity. “Do you mean to base your defence on such a contemptible assertion, and stand at bay thereon?”

“Yes, Sir; for I hope that the law will find out the real

culprit, and shew who was guilty of this fraud—my Italian acquaintance or I."

Johannes considered a moment, and then, looking Leuthold full in the face, he said, composedly, "Is that false friend the purchaser of the factory at Unkenheim? Or were you able to find an abundance of friends in Italy, when here you could not acquire one?"

Leuthold grew pale again, and Johannes saw at once that he had probed a deep wound. He used his opportunity directly. "I have no doubt the overlooker at Unkenheim will be so well acquainted with your Italian friend as to be able to produce the desired evidence to exonerate you; and I will do my utmost to secure this happy result." He observed Leuthold, who could scarce disguise his uneasiness. "Well, Herr Gleissert, I give you four-and-twenty hours in which to make up your mind whether you will come to an explanation with me, or appear before the magistrates. If you do not shew me before to-morrow evening what has become of the Fräulein's property, and produce either the money or, if it has been sunk in the Unkenheim factory, every legal guarantee that it is available, then your fate must run its course. From this hour I will watch your house, and spend the night in guard before your door. You are now my prisoner; but if you give me occasion to suppose you are attempting an escape, I shall hand you over to the police. You see I am firmly resolved as to what I shall do. Hope nothing from my weakness, nor from your keenness of intellect. For even if what seems impossible were to happen, and you succeed in bribing heavily some Italian sharper to personate your 'false friend,' take the crime on his own shoulders, and go to jail for you; even if the notary were dead, and so your identity could not be established, even then you would come under the arm of the law, on the charge of stealing letters."

Leuthold started.

"The two sound eyes of a peasant cannot be charged by you as lying witnesses, when they saw you, for want of other amusement, at night explore the contents of the

letter-box and keep back such letters as specially interested you!"

Johannes turned to Ernestine. "I do not know, my Fräulein, whether you wrote to me at any time; but if so, your uncle knows the contents of the letter better than I, who never received it. Anyhow, this little incident may serve to shew you an illustration of the character of your uncle; and I can establish what I have said by witnesses. You will now, Herr Gleissert, understand that there is no safety for you unless you fulfil the conditions under which alone I will spare the young lady the disgrace of having a near relation in prison. You are surrounded on all sides—shut in by your own crimes, and you shall not escape me."

He ceased. Leuthold sat pale and silent in his chair.

Ernestine looked down compassionately at the crushed man. Then she turned her eyes on Johannes with an expression of admiration verging on fear. "You are, as I have always found you, just, but *hard*."

"Hard? No, indeed. The punishment the conscienceless man deserves cannot be hard enough. My imagination can find none equal to his deserts!" He looked at Ernestine with deep sorrow, "You are tired out, and need repose——" He waited an answer; but none came. The setting sun flung its red beams into the room. Ernestine stood with folded arms and without speaking, as if gathering herself by the concentration of her expiring powers. Leuthold had his head in his hands, and did not stir. Johannes took his hat. "Farewell, Ernestine! Allow me to return about this time to-morrow, to hear the decision of your uncle." He took a step towards her. "I will not be irksome to you; but allow me this care for your fate: I ask to be allowed this as a friend—as nothing else—nothing else."

"Nothing else!" was the bitter echo in Ernestine's heart, and she let him depart without a word, without a look, with only a stiff bend of the head. "He loves me not," she said to herself, and her heart turned to ice. She thought he cared for her as a man of honour, not as a lover. He knows that she liked him; she had not disguised it from him. He had piled up impediments between them in the shape of

his bigoted conditions. He knows that these alone separate them, and yet he would resign Ernestine rather than his crochets. He would exact from her complete surrender, without making the smallest concession himself. No; her uncle was right, he had never loved her. How could she ever draw nearer to him without the certainty of inspiring deference? How could she give way, suspecting as she did that he had only made these demands under the conviction that she must refuse them? The slightest advance on his side, the smallest token that he was ready to step down from his pedestal to meet her, ready to level the barrier that intercepted them, would have given her new warmth and inspired her with joy. But after to-day no union was possible: all thought of it must be cast away.

Leuthold roused her from her thoughts. He had left the room, and now returned with a letter. He stepped up to his niece with the appearance of one who had come to a fatal determination. "Read this, and then shew yourself in your true greatness!"

Ernestine unfolded the paper with uneasiness. It was a letter from the overseer written the day before. In a few words it announced that the bailiffs were in the place, and that unless Leuthold made off at once he would be arrested. Ernestine read, and read again; she could not apparently understand it. "What is the meaning of this?" she asked at length.

"It means that Möllner was right when he charged me with being a forger and a thief."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Ernestine, in deadly alarm.

"The capital which has been sunk and lost in the Unkenheim factory was, yours——" groaned Leuthold.

"So you have robbed me of my fortune," she said, faintly.

Leuthold stood before her the image of contrition. "Yes!"

He said nothing further. Ernestine uttered a low cry, and stepped back from him. He breathed with difficulty; at last he said, "I would and could confess nothing to that man. There is but one soul on earth noble enough to forgive me, and no eyes but yours shall see me in my weakness. Ernestine, I have already told you the grounds of love and

care which urged me to conceal from you that you had ceased to be legally my ward. If at any time in my life I have acted conscientiously and unselfishly, it was then. Do you believe that?"

"I will believe it."

"I had no idea then into what fatal temptations it would draw me. The consequence of this, my first fault, was that I was forced to draw out the capital which fell to you at eighteen, without your knowledge, or you would have discovered your own independence. I resolved to do this, acting on the conviction that I was considering your best interests. I committed that forgery, little dreaming what a hard punishment it entailed on me. For months I had your fortune in my hands, and guarded it as the apple of my eye. Till then I had been an honest man, though I may have transgressed the letter of the law. But then came the turning point of my life, and I must entreat you to listen considerately to the dreadful confession I have to make. Just then the brother of Madam Möllner was bankrupt, and the Unkenheim factory was offered for sale on the most advantageous terms. Can you not imagine how the heart of a man of business clings to the business which he has long carried on with success, and which was the creation of his abilities, the work of his hands? It was so with me. With bitter sorrow I had seen that flourishing concern, to the making of which I had devoted my best years, fall to ruin. Now it was again in the market. Ignorance and mismanagement had brought it to failure. I who knew every corner and fold of the business was sure of being able to restore it again, if I could only lay my hand on the money wherewith to purchase it. I long resisted the temptation. Then the advertisement appeared again, and again for the third time. I discussed the matter with a manufacturer in Naples, who was then, by chance, about to go to Germany. He urged me strongly to buy; he offered to purchase it in his name for me. The opportunity was so favourable,—the money lay idle in my strong-box. I felt so confident of doubling it, and of making something to secure myself and my poor child from future want; I was so certain that you

would not reproach me when you came to know, later, the use to which I had put your money! Ten times I came to your door, resolved to tell you all the truth, honourably, and ask your leave to speculate with the capital. I knew you would not refuse, but the dreadful fear of losing you, when you learned your emancipation from my guardianship, held me back. I took your money with the firm resolution to return every penny and farthing. Thus far the history of my wrong: now that of my misfortunes. What I attempted failed. I enlarged the manufactory and then found that I was hampered with unexpected difficulties; raw materials which I bought at a high figure fell in value after I had worked them up, and I was forced to sell at a loss of something like fifty per cent. This and other mistakes followed each other in quick succession. A curse lay on all I undertook—I confess it the curse of having over-estimated my abilities and business knowledge—for I ought to have seen that a man of learning is not cut out for business, and that the technical knowledge of chemistry which had been so useful to me in a small concern was not what was calculated to carry on an extensive business on a large scale. What good can repentance and knowledge of my deficiencies do me now? I have learnt this terrible lesson, Ernestine, at your expense. I can refund nothing, save the fare to New York; can make no amends to you, save the suffering of having to make this humiliating confession. Make your decision: be the results to me what they may, I will receive my sentence from you, and from no one else."

The hypocrite sank, as crushed, before her feet, and pressed her cold finger tips to his lips.

"Uncle!" began Ernestine, and her voice shook, "stand up! It revolts me to see a man whom I have been accustomed to fear, wriggle at my feet like a wounded snake, whose contortions awake abhorrence rather than pity. Get up, in the name of manliness, get up!" She turned from him, so as not to be obliged to see him any more.

"Ernestine!" exclaimed Leuthold in dismay, "you are made of stone."

"I am what you have made me."

He had expected another result from his appeal: he looked at Ernestine with deathly fear, as she again ran her eye over the letter, and sank into the sofa and covered her face.

"Ernestine, compose yourself," he exclaimed with his usual audacity peering through the mask of penitence he had assumed. "Punish my trespass, revenge yourself as you will, but do not let me see you so small as to be snivelling over lost Mammon."

"Do you think, you man without a conscience—that I am lamenting the Mammon?" said Ernestine, with exasperation, but dignity. "If you had honourably asked the money of me, and lost it by your misfortunes, I would have died rather than reproach you with a word or with a tear. But that I must despise the only man on whom I have any claim, that my fortune should have fallen a sacrifice to a crime,—this is more than my patience can endure. You know best what depends on the dead metal of which you have robbed me,—freedom of thought and of action, the noblest possessions life has. This is what you have deprived me of, for you are no mean thief who steals money. You know what the loss of a fortune entails on a woman, dependence, perhaps servitude. And servitude to a soul which has not chosen to bow before any power in heaven and earth, which has stood as its own centre, in its pride, in the midst of a world of its own creation, a servitude to a soul such as mine, is the degradation of a free spirit to a machine, wound up, and set going, and directed at the caprice of others—this is what is prepared for me! Can you not conceive the death! Death it will be to me, to my active, independent, isolated mind, and yet you scoff at me for 'snivelling over lost Mammon?' But see, in this moment I am forgetting all that you have done for me since childhood, the incalculable intellectual treasures you have given me in place of the earthly fortune of which you have deprived me. For the sake of them I spare you the punishment which it lies in my power to make

you suffer. If you can save yourself, do so, but do not ask of me to be so 'great' as also to forgive you!"

Leuthold breathed freer. This was what he wanted, that she should not appear against him. Now the worst was past; and if in the first moment of her indignation she could reject the satisfaction of inflicting condign punishment on him, it would be possible for him to persuade her, when more composed, to share his flight.

"Ernestine," said he, after a moment's consideration, "Every word you have spoken has been a coal of fire heaped on my head that deserved your curse. Even in your righteous wrath you preserve your nobility and serenity. You allow me to escape. But can you believe that I will go without you? That I can endure to leave you in poverty and destitution, and not to be able to care for you and work for you? I have watched you through long years with the solicitude of a mother, and can I now desert you when you need my protection more than ever? My girl, if you can think this of me, you do me a grievous wrong."

Ernestine looked at him with astonishment.

"Either you fly with me," said Leuthold, with heroic determination, "or I remain and await my fate."

Ernestine drew back. "I go with you? No, I cannot debase myself to that. From this moment our paths lie apart."

Leuthold saw her loathing of him with apprehension. He was lost, if she stuck to her resolution. For if he succeeded in escaping without her, and evading Möllner for the moment, it was sure to come out that Ernestine had been robbed of her fortune by him and deserted without a penny, and his implacable adversary would then pursue him with greater determination than ever. As long as Ernestine remained, she could be subpoenaed as a witness against him, and if once she were placed in the witness-box, her unassailable veracity was certain to reveal everything about him. As long as she remained in Germany she was a standing menace to him. Only when she was near him, under his care, was she innocuous; he could be safe only whilst he kept her by him, and away from Möllner.

"It is perfectly natural that you should detest me," he

said, "and I will not appeal to all the sacrifices of time and strength I have made for you since childhood, nor to the patience with which I have borne your many vagaries, nor to the love which preserved you alive after Heim had given you up, and which reared you. You have alluded to this, and you think you have repaid it sufficiently by generously refusing to send your uncle to jail. You know best what all this was worth to you. But, Ernestine, you must not, at all events, hate me more than your father, whom you have forgiven long ago, and think of still with pity, for I may boldly say, looking you in the face, that I have treated you better than he. He did not bring you up, I did. He scarce fed you, hardly clothed you; I have surrounded you with everything your heart could desire. He always hated you, I have loved you from a child. You must still remember how often I stepped between him and you, to save you from ill-treatment, and when I was not present to protect you, he nearly beat you to death. He would never have provided for you as a father, if he had not been frightened at the consequences of what he had done to you. The fortune, Ernestine, of which I have deprived you was made up of my earnings. Two-thirds of it were by all laws of right and honour *mine*, a debt owed me by your father for my services. He robbed me to make amends to you, and I said nothing. I abandoned the thought of asserting my claims, which I believe might have been legally established, for your sake. I parted with my child, that she might be educated in accordance with the humble lot which must be hers—the best evidence that I had no intention of meddling with your property. For all that I denied myself I asked no return, save the delight, the immeasurable delight, of developing a young intellect, the like of which has never yet been met with in a woman's head. You can bear testimony to me, that I taught you nothing wrong; that I opened your eyes to all that is good and beautiful; that I helped you to decipher the book of Nature, in which stands nothing but what is the noblest that the human mind can acquire. In the aversion with which you regard your deeply-fallen Teacher, you may dis-

cover how pure he has kept your heart. I ask you, Ernestine, to consider whether all this does not give me at least a right equal to that of your father to obtain your compassion?"

Ernestine listened to him with growing emotion and sympathy. She buried her face in the sofa-cushions, and burst into tears.

Leuthold saw this with satisfaction. He knew that a woman who weeps has laid aside her arms. He proceeded—"You convince me that I have nothing to fear from your heart. You have promised not to execute your revenge on me, and a character like yours keeps its promises. But, Ernestine, this does not suffice me. I shall find no rest for my tortured mind, till you allow me to consider your future. Let me at least *try* to make amends for my crime; grant me the only alleviation possible to the heavy burden which bows me to earth. Have pity on me, and allow the criminal the expiation which can cleanse."

"What am I to do then?" faltered Ernestine.

"Come with me, my child, and share with me my crust of bread that I shall earn, till you occupy a situation worthy of you, and such as you cannot procure in Germany. You have signed a contract, offering you a brilliant career in New York: you cannot, must not, break it, especially now when you are on the look-out for a situation which will support you. It would be madness to refuse the only thing that offers, and which is so exactly suited to your capacities. You have got abundance of material, but not enough to carry you through a whole course of lectures. You know best that in beginning fresh work you cannot do without me. You have not completed your studies, and you must not expose your ignorance before the Americans. You must have your subject mastered, and at your fingers' ends. Hate and despise me as much as you like, but at all events avail yourself of my protection during the journey to New York, and of my assistance, without which you cannot venture to lecture in public. I detest sentimentality, but it is a difficult thing—as the saying goes—to bury a relation before he is dead,—and you will find it more diffi-

cult to do so with me—who has stood by you so closely and so long—than you now imagine. One cannot tear oneself away easily from recollection of the pleasant hours, days, and years of common labour, and with the recollection the dead man wakes, and begins to knock at his coffin-lid.” He ceased. Ernestine’s short, hasty breathing betrayed the struggle that raged in her soul. Presently she sprang up, shook her head, and walked indecisively up and down the room.

Leuthold went on. “There is no alternative; you must come with me. What else can you do? Think, what would you do if you remained here?”

“I do not know,” muttered she, gloomily.

“There is no one here to whom you could turn, except Möllner.”

Ernestine thought a moment and said, “And old Heim.”

“Bah! Heim and the Möllners are one family. They will take you in somehow between them, no doubt. It will be a great triumph for old Heim to be able to brag that all has turned out as he foretold.”

Ernestine clenched her teeth.

“You may rely on it, that after what has taken place these people will think themselves bound to provide for you in some way or other. They will probably get you a situation as governess, when you become burdensome to them. The thing for you to consider is, whether this would not be a greater humiliation to you than coming with me. Good heavens! Do you think that every man in the steam-packet to New York must have a clean conscience? And do you purpose not to sail until you have catechised your fellow-passengers satisfactorily? Rank your uncle as a mere fellow-passenger. I will not trouble you, but will keep out of sight as much as possible.”

He awaited her answer. Ernestine looked moodily on the ground.

“Or will you take up the already rejected offer of Möllner, as an afterthought, and go to Madam Mamma, and beg her pardon? I fear if you were to do so, that cunning old woman would say, ‘Aha! she was high and mighty as long

as she was well off; but now she has nothing she has to knuckle under, and come here cringing for shelter and food! Look at this hoiden! when she is hungry she is ready enough to come and beg a crust. Hunger tames wild beasts and dauntless hearts, for when the stomach is empty the heart is yielding.”

“Cease uncle!” cried Ernestine, shuddering.

But Leuthold would not be interrupted. He was now again in his element. “That is what the Frau Mamma will say, for these intellectual aristocrats are proud of their incompetence, and exact like incompetence of others. And what will the Herr Professor say? He will, of course, now feel himself doubly and trebly bound to marry you, and cuddle and feed the poor starving, freezing beggar-girl at his fireside. But when the first intoxication of pity is past, what, Ernestine, will he say to himself, when he turns the matter over at leisure?”

“He will say, she married me not out of love, but out of necessity!”

“Consequently, I am no longer bound to love her,” added Leuthold.

“Or to respect her!” concluded Ernestine, trembling in all her limbs. “No, no! It shall not come to this; I have not sunk so deep yet! That great, noble man shall not charge me with self-seeking; that proud mother shall not find me kneeling as a beggar at her door. I had rather be drowned in the depths of the ocean!” She drew towards Leuthold; her breath came fast, her pulse bounded: “Uncle, you have destroyed my life’s happiness—save, O save the only thing that remains to me, my self-respect.”

“Then come! When the wide sea rolls between us and these people, you will be secure against your own weakness.”

Ernestine was exhausted; she let her arms fall. “Very well, then: Uncle, you have conquered!”

CHAPTER IX.

SCIENCE AND FAITH.

THE grey dawn sought in vain to lift the veil which a rainy night had left enveloping hill and valley. The morning was one of those in the decline of summer which recall a faded beauty risen late from her bed, exposing her withered charms to the light without fear of being seen. The rising sun stole white and frosty behind the vapours, and the bushes dripped as though weeping with discontent.

The pale watchman, who had paced round the castle all night long, shook also discontentedly the drops from his mantle. He shivered with cold, he drooped wearily, and looked with some impatience towards the school-house, expecting thence his release.

Nor had he long to wait; for presently there appeared at the door a sturdy young man, who made towards him. At that moment the church clock struck a drowsy half-past four.

"To the minute!" exclaimed the elder. "You are punctuality itself."

"Good morning," said Walter. "It is fresh, by Jove! You must be well-nigh frozen."

"Not more than the huntsman on the look out for game," answered Johannes. "Love of sport keeps his blood in circulation. I assure you my blood has been boiling with eagerness to nail that wild beast yonder, should he sneak from his lair. Walter! I am an easy-going fellow generally, and not soon roused; but had that scoundrel tried to break out last night, and had fallen into my hands, I cannot answer for the consequences."

"And no wonder," responded Walter. "I ask for nothing

better myself than to have his slippery shoulder in one hand and a good thorn cudgel in the other. But what have you done with yourself all night: have you not sat down at all?"

"No; I was too restless. Besides, the bench yonder was wet. However, I feel the damp and weariness now in every bone."

"Well, go and get dry at once. Father expects you, is already up, and mother has brewed you a cup of strong coffee."

"You are kind people," said Johannes. "Oh, Walter! I am in a fever of excitement. Gleissert remained till midnight with Ernestine. I could see their heads when I stood on the mound. They seemed engaged in energetic conversation, and moved up and down for all the world as if they were packing. Walter! I could not endure it, if she——"

"Don't bother yourself with such fancies. It is impossible that she should yield to Gleissert's authority after what you have revealed to her of his character."

"But, then, how could she tolerate his presence in her room, and breathe the same air, for an hour?"

"It is queer, I admit. But, be that as it may, there is nothing to be done by us but watch and wait. I promise you to do my duty scrupulously. Now be off to bed for a couple of hours, so that I may be set free at school time. If you had only allowed me to be on guard all night, I would have kept as sharp a look out as you."

"It will be enough if you lighten my self-imposed task during the day. Well, then, till we meet again. A little before eight o'clock I shall return to relieve guard." Saying these words, Johannes walked away to the school-house with weary steps. When he entered the low, dusky room he saw the steaming coffee-pot on the table. Frau Leonhardt had seen him coming, and prepared everything.

Herr Leonhardt sat in his wonted place against the stove, and he held out his hand to the young man. "God's blessing on you, Sir!" he said. "You must be much exhausted by your night watch."

"It has not been pleasant, dear old friend," answered

Johannes; "but it has taught me one thing—respect for the noble order of night-watchmen. Thanks, thanks, Frau Leonhardt. I really am not in a humour for food."

"But do not drink the coffee without a mouthful of solid food," said the old woman. "There it is—but I will not press you to take it."

"Yes, I see it, Frau Leonhardt," said Johannes, smiling at the basket piled up with bread.

"Do you know Brigit was up half the night baking fresh rolls for you, as she knew she could get none from the baker's at this hour, and that she had in the house was as dry as a bone? So you must eat some of it, or you will disappoint her."

"Go along, you chattering old fellow," said the wife; "you should not let domestic secrets out, which cover one with confusion."

"My dear, the Professor is just one of those men who value little attentions. I knew that, or I would not have said what I have. You do your best, and no one can do more than that."

"That is Gospel truth!" exclaimed Johannes, clasping the hand of the old woman, "that is the way with women; you have shewn true woman's nature, which I love and revere wherever I find it. Well, I will eat something, and enjoy it too."

So he constrained himself and ate a few mouthfuls, that sleep might not have been banished the weary eyes of his hostess in vain.

"If only the young lady had dreamed that you were outside the house all night in rain, and cold, and darkness, her heart would have melted with pity!" Brigit said this, and Johannes answered, bitterly, "She knows no pity."

The old schoolmaster laid his hand gently on the shoulder of Johannes. "That you do not yourself believe," he said. "You love her too well to believe it of her. Now you speak in the bitterness of your spirit. I would that you could see into her noble soul as clearly as I do, who am blinded by no passion. It may seem odd to hear me speak of seeing, but yet the expression is true in one sense."

"But, Father Leonhardt, who denies that Ernestine is a noble being? Would I not do all this for her because I know she is worthy of it, even though I knew she would reject me for my pains? That I would; and yet, if you had looked, as I did yesterday, into that cold, stony face, you would have doubted whether that young creature bore a human heart in her bosom."

"I am sure, quite sure, she has one," said the old man, with emphasis. "But you must consider, Professor, that hitherto her heart has received all its food through her reason. She has been given nothing that she could love, but ideas. She knows nobody. How can you wonder if she only dares to love where her reason justifies her? And this her reason will not do in your case; for you have opposed her at every point. Her reason is ranged against you in deadly hostility as the foe of all that she has been taught to cherish. In mind Ernestine is a man; but her heart's affections are as undeveloped as those of a girl of fifteen. The consequence is that she is a prey to conflicting emotions and principles. Her nature has become to her an insoluble tangle. Have patience; time alone will clear the ground and solve the perplexity. Her heart will swell and brace itself; do not, through too great impetuosity, scare back the young feelings that are starting into life. She finds herself in the world of feeling as a stranger, groping about, ignorant of her way and of the relative sizes of objects. She needs a patient and forbearing guide, and that I trust she will find in you. But do your utmost to prevent her going to America; for if she goes she is lost to you and to all good."

"Rely on me, dear, prudent friend," said Johannes, and his face became set with iron resolve; "I will save her, not for my sake, but for her own."

"And now that you have breakfasted," said Leonhardt, "lie down and take a nap. My wife has made a bed for you upstairs."

"I will gladly do so," answered Johannes; "for I am thoroughly tired out, and I have a hard day's work before me."

"Then follow me. I will lead you to your room," said

the old man; and he added, smiling, "Yes, the blind can sometimes lead those that see. Follow me. I know every corner of this little house."

The two went upstairs. Herr Leonhardt opened a door and let Johannes enter. "I hope you will find everything comfortable," he said; and then he passed his trembling hands over the feather-bed. "Now lie down. I will not leave the room till I know you are in bed."

Johannes threw off his soaked garments, as he had been requested. The old schoolmaster drew the feather-bed over him to the neck, then felt once more over it, to make sure that it covered his guest.

"Now," said he, "sleep soundly; you want rest!" and then he groped his way out of the room.

"Thanks! a thousand thanks!" Johannes called after him. He heard the old man cautiously and painfully feeling his way down the steep steps. Then his eyes closed. He still heard the words of the housewife, "If only the young lady had dreamed that you were outside the house all night in rain, and cold, and darkness. . . ." But Ernestine knew it. There was no need for her to dream it. He had told her plainly that he would watch the house; yet not once had she opened the window and looked out to see if he kept his promise. But stay! She was coming to him. The door opened gently. Was the uncle there? No; it was she herself, and alone. "Come," she whispered; "you are frozen, come to me, and I will warm you." Then she took his numbed hands, and breathed on them and chafed them. "Come," she said, "come within, and watch on the ground-floor. There you will be in shelter from the rain, and can watch my uncle as well as outside; and I will remain by you, and never, never again leave you."

"Ernestine!" cried Johannes, and started up.

He was wide awake and alone. He could not have slept half-an-hour, and now he found it impossible to compose himself to sleep again. He lay quiet for awhile, and then he rose to meet the critical day that awaited him.

* * * * *

It was evening. Ernestine sat, as she had the day before, at her writing-table, but to-day it was cleared, the contents of the desk and drawers, the books that stood on it, were packed; the boxes which had been filled the day before were now locked and corded.

Ernestine had laid her hands wearily in her lap, and she listened with indifference, almost stupor, to the voice of her uncle as he gave the sobbing Willmers particulars as to the disposal of the furniture after their departure.

"I have left the physiological books and apparatus to Walter Leonhardt," she said.

"What!" exclaimed Leuthold, "have you disposed thus of articles worth nearly a thousand thalers?" But he refrained from saying more before Willmers. The latter had sufficient tact to withdraw. "Now that we are beggars it is not a time for flinging your money out of the window," he said gloomily.

"A thousand thalers would not save me from hunger," answered Ernestine, coldly, "and they will found the future of the young man. He has talents which deserve encouragement, and the best encouragement that can be given him is this present of the means of prosecuting his studies."

"Indeed! so you think you have a vocation for the encouragement of limping talents!"

"Uncle!" said Ernestine, in a hard tone, "I will trouble you to keep to yourself your observations on my acts. It would seem to be easier for a person to shake off the habit of submission than of dictation. Since yesterday I have cast aside my wonted submission, like an old cloak; you will oblige me by doing the same with your habit of dictation."

"I thought I might at least advise," said Leuthold.

"When I desire advice I will ask for it. As to this matter of the young schoolmaster and the apparatus, it is enough for me to say, I choose that it shall be so."

Leuthold eyed the stern figure with a mixture of fear and hate, and thought within himself, "When I have you at sea, my fine lady, you shall atone for all that you have made me suffer."

Then his restless spirit called up before his mind's eye the vengeance he would execute on her in a new world. An ugly smile crawled over his lips as he pictured her in her pride, battling with the contempt of the world, and starving in her helplessness.

Ernestine rose. "We have only a few hours longer here," she said, "I must make sure that my intentions are carried out, and not cheated by some underhand dealing." She strode into the laboratory and packed up the apparatus as well as she could. Then she took back from Willmers the letter she had written to Leonhardt, that she might add a few lines to it. "Whatever happens keep these books and instruments. Say they are your own, that I have given them to you, or they may be snatched from you. Nevertheless, reserve them for me."

She did this to save her present from becoming the prey of creditors, and she bade Leonhardt keep them as a trust for her, as she was convinced that otherwise he would yield them up. Then she sent for servants, and had the boxes and letter conveyed to the school-house. When the men had departed with their loads, she went to the library, and began to sort out the volumes she destined for Walter.

Then Leuthold rushed in to her gasping, "Möllner is at the door. Control yourself." He trembled with excitement, and his teeth chattered. "Be strong, Ernestine, a human life hangs on your conduct now. If you do not save me from Möllner's revenge and the chastisement of the law, I shall die by my own hand. By my child, the most sacred object I know, I swear that I will commit suicide before I put out my arms for handcuffs, so decide what you will do."

Ernestine looked at him with horror. Now he spoke the truth. Blank, naked despair glared at her out of his eyes.

"Uncle!" she exclaimed, "compose yourself. I will not drive you to self-murder; I promise you that my resolve is taken and will not be shaken. Will you be present at the meeting?"

"No, I will not, I will hasten preparations for our departure, so that we may get away without let or hindrance.

But do not forget that we have compromised matters, and come to an agreement together. Mind you say that."

"I give you my word of honour, I will."

"Then I will go; I do not want to meet him if I can avoid it. I bless your lips for your promise: my curse on them if you break it."

He escaped from the room. Ernestine looked after him with agitation. A human life depended on her tongue, a curse would fall on her if she uttered an inconsiderate word. She stood alone, helpless, with this tremendous responsibility weighing upon her,—and she was but a young, inexperienced girl, hardly able to answer for herself, to bear her own responsibilities. She gathered up her last flagging powers, to meet the occasion, but felt how inadequate they were, how ready they were to break and fail her when she leaned on them.

The dreaded man entered.

"Pardon me, Ernestine," he said, "if I enter without announcing myself. Willmers told me to come this way. There is no time now for empty forms. The matter to be dealt with, to be fought for, if need be, is one of life or death. I see that you have sent boxes to Leonhardt's, a sign that speedy departure is contemplated. I hasten hither, and Willmers tells me that you are about to leave,—actually to leave with your uncle. Ernestine! I have not a word to express the pain this has caused me. Ernestine! I could endure it to be rejected when I sought your hand, for I could love you still; but I cannot,—I cannot bear to believe that you are unworthy of my love."

"What, then, can have lowered me so greatly in your eyes?" asked Ernestine, with wounded pride.

"What!—why that you do not separate at once from a scoundrel as from evil itself;—that you do not shrink from associating with a man abhorred by God and man;—that you feel so little loathing for crime that you will actually join your lot with a criminal. Ernestine, I cannot, I will not believe this of you. If I believed that you were without moral sense, Ernestine, it would be the death of me."

"He has excused himself to me," said Ernestine, cut to

the heart by this reproach; "he has shewn me that it is unjust to condemn any man unheard. I do not feel myself so perfect and infallible that I am justified in judging him. I leave that to others, greater and stronger than myself. It is true that the link between us is broken, but our courses lie in the same direction. I cannot forbid him walking along the road I tread."

"Are you not afraid of the disgrace which will attach to you by associating with a criminal?"

"Law has no more right over him. He has compromised matters with me, and I am satisfied. That is sufficient."

"Good God! You are so inexperienced in these matters, that the fellow with his oily tongue has been able again to deceive you. At least tell me what he has offered you in discharge of his debt to you."

Ernestine drew herself up. Anxiety well-nigh strangled her. To conceal her fear, she imposed on herself a colder and harsher manner than usual. "It is sufficient if I inform you that I am satisfied. Rest content with that."

"Ernestine!" cried Johannes, "in what tones do you address me? I act and think only for you, for your welfare, and you defy me as an enemy."

"I am grateful for your solicitude. But now, my friend, I must beg you to lay aside your interference with my affairs. I shall prefer managing them myself."

"Then I tell you, Ernestine, that I will not withhold my hand, but that I will pluck you from the gulf into which you are precipitating yourself, whether you like it or not. First of all I shall secure your travelling companion. He has not produced the securities I demanded that your property is forthcoming; the time I allowed him has elapsed—the four-and-twenty hours grace I yielded." He turned to the door.

"Johannes, what are you going to do?" cried Ernestine.

"I am going to hand him over to the police."

Ernestine planted herself in the doorway. "You shall not do that."

"Why not?"

"Will you revenge that which I have forgiven? You will not venture to intrude into my affairs to such an extent as

that, which would make it impossible for me to deal with a wrong done me as I please, with pardon or punishment. The affair is mine, and I have a right to ask that my private matters should not be dragged into public notice without my consent. Pray, how long has it been customary for strangers—yes, I repeat, strangers,—to intermeddle in the private concerns of others, like delegates of the Holy Vehm?”

“Ernestine!” cried Johannes, controlling himself with an effort. “You put my patience to a hard test. Yet I forgive you—for you are but a woman!”

Ernestine started at this sentence. He made a motion to her to be silent, and continued, “You are but a woman, easily moved, easily deceived, and that your uncle knew perfectly. You little know what you are about in attaching yourself to this scoundrel. I thought, indeed, that I had opened your eyes yesterday, but I acknowledge my error. I opened your eyes indeed, but did not teach you to understand what you saw. I will repeat my lesson and supplement it. I will show you the motive of your uncle’s conduct towards you.”

“I have already explained to you,” replied Ernestine, “that I know his motives, and need no further enlightenment. He has erred, erred grievously, and I am not going to dispute it. Nor does he. But he has dedicated his life to me, with a self-devotion such as is rarely met with in this egoistic world. He has lived for me, as long as I can remember anything, and all his trespasses have arisen from his solicitude for me. You may think it incredible that a man should so sacrifice himself in the interests of a female. To you, a life restrained to intellectual association with a woman seems an impossibility; and in your mean and despicable jealousy you are ready to fall on and chastise the man who has thus risen above vulgar prejudice.”

“Ernestine!” exclaimed Johannes, exasperated to the last degree, “If you will not listen to me now—as sure as I trust in God, my helper—I cast you off, out of my thoughts, out of my recollections, out of my interest, from this moment—for ever.”

He paused a moment. Ernestine was agitated, her heart

failed her, her eyelashes fell. She stood waiting for what he had to say.

"Very well, then. I admit that so far you are right. It does seem to me impossible for a man to devote his whole life and energies to the education of a woman's mind. I am a man who can love like another man. You know that I love you, and if I possessed you, I would devote myself to you body and soul, true and immutable till death, with religious devotion. But in my love for you to surrender all my interests and duties in life! to allow my manly vocation and activity in the intellectual world to sink into effeminate slumber at your feet! I could not do it, however passionately and sincerely I loved you. Woman can do this; she can devote her whole self, and make her whole world circle round her husband, for she has no centre of gravity cast in the exterior world. And if this be the case with me, I am quite positive that no man will make this sacrifice for the mere obligation of relationship. There is some other object which your uncle aims at; some other spring sets his works in motion. I will make clear to you what that object, what that motive is. He is a legacy hunter. That it is which has made him a murderer of soul and body. Restrain yourself one moment. I will substantiate every one of my charges. Ever since he has been your guardian, he has had his eye on your fortune, and that is what he has been trying to possess himself of. The possession of this has been, if I mistake not, the fixed idea of his life, for he persuaded your father to bequeath it to him, minus only that share which, by law, is inalienable from a child. Dr. Heim induced your father to draw up a fresh will, and restore to you your proper place as his heiress. But Heim was not energetic enough in the matter, for the will still afforded foothold for the scoundrel to recommence his efforts to appropriate the whole. He was determined to recover all for himself, and circumstances favoured him. Your father left the whole of his property to Gleissert and his children in the event of your dying *unmarried*. When your father died, you were a sickly, delicate child, and Gleissert was able to

flatter himself that you would not long stand in his way. But the little demure Ernestine played him the cruel trick of surviving her delicate childhood and the shock of her injury. Body and mind grew and became strong. Hopes that she would die faded, but the lust after her money did not expire. Your uncle then schemed to secure the eventual possession of your fortune, at least for his child, by making sure that you should never marry. For that purpose he secluded you from the world, and dissociated you from it in your manners and mode of thought, your tastes, and ambitions. It was for this reason that he concealed from you that your wardship had expired. He would not let go his hold on you till he had made you incompatible with modern social life. This was the plan on which he brought you up; this was the motive of the tender solicitude you so admire. The time and pains it cost him, he reckoned as labour spent on a business worth ninety thousand thalers, and bringing in annually an easy income such as no professorship would yield. Was not this legacy-hunting? Now to my charge of murder. By murder I do not mean assassination with dagger or poison; Gleissert is too great a coward to try such means as these. The poison he employs is not so quick working as arsenic, but then it has this advantage, that no chemist can detect it, no judge punish the employment of it. He sought the destruction of your body through your mind. He knew how to plant in your passionate soul an ambition, which would reckon nothing too costly to be sacrificed, which would impel you in feverish excitement to overwork and strain till they snapped the delicate fibres of your nervous system; he fanned to furious heat the pride of intellect he had kindled in you, hoping that it would consume your vital powers, and fling you, a burnt-out rush, into an early grave. The scheme was clever, and deep-laid, and yet two honest eyes saw through it. He did not indeed stand over you cane in hand, and lash you to your work, like a slave-driver; he did not compel you to watch out the nights, and deny your overstrung nerves their needful repose. No, no! he made you do this of your own free will. He saw you

growing feebler daily, but pretended not to observe it. He did not intend to kill you with his own hand, but he pressed the poison into your hand, and flattered you into drinking it. When your natural love of life cried out for help, he forbade you seeing a doctor, fearing lest he should administer an antidote. Thus he sought to make you destroy your own self. Now he is attempting to carry you off to America, there to bury you. These are my grounds for a charge of *physical* murder. Now for that which is as grave—the charge of *spiritual* murder. As I said before, your uncle kept you apart from the world, to ensure your not marrying. But how was he to ensure this? By making you an object of abhorrence to society, so that it should stand apart from you, and refuse to accept you into its ring. For this end he snapped every thread of sympathy between you and mankind. And to complete the severance, he destroyed your belief. Even had he committed no other crime against you, it would be impossible to punish this alone with sufficient severity."

"However this may be," said Ernestine, vainly struggling to disguise her terror, "you are speaking now like a parson and not like a professor. Whether your other charges are well founded or not, I will not take on myself now to determine. But I will not allow this last to pass unchallenged. It is true, indeed, that my uncle has deprived me of my religious belief; but he has given me, in its room, something more positive, practical, and reasonable,—he has given me Natural Philosophy as the end and aim of thought, and that in which alone the doubting spirit may find its rest."

"O what a fatal delusion," exclaimed Johannes. "Do you think that *this* will take the place of Faith? Can a great soul like yours rest satisfied with the knowledge of laws without raising its eyes to the Author and Giver of all law? Excuse me if I do talk as a parson and not as a professor; but this is a point I must be plain on with you before we—part. I would, if possible, give you back one thing of which you have been cruelly robbed by your uncle, one thing that women usually possess as a privilege above

men,—the faculty of seeing heaven open, when the world is full of weariness and disappointment.”

Ernestine stared at him with undisguised astonishment. “You talk thus! You, a man versed in the exact sciences, which teach us never to trust in what has not been demonstrated to the reason! What matters to us the God, whose cudgels you take up so vigorously, when we know that Nature has brought all things about of her own power?”

Johannes shook his head. “Ernestine, is it only possible to believe in Him as brooding over the waters, and creating the world in seven days? These are symbolical expressions, not literal descriptions of creation or of the Eternal One. To my mind Faith and Science can well keep peace with one another, if Faith be not too exacting, and bind the believer to the letter, and Science be not too sceptical, but, on the contrary, humble and reverent. I am one of those in whose hearts they are in accord, but not without some struggles. I cannot give my Faith a concrete form perhaps. I shrink from defining my God with human similitude and investing Him with human passions, as did the old Jew; but my soul turns to Him, nevertheless, with an unutterable yearning, as a little child to its father, and in this instinctive yearning I rely on an assurance that above me is the object of my sure confidence, my Father, my God.”

“That is a mere subjective feeling; it proves nothing.”

“No, it proves nothing to demonstration. But the existence of God is as little capable of logical demonstration as it is of logical denial. He stands to the world in the relation of the soul to the body, if I may so speak, and the soul is incapable of being given concrete form, and of scientific demonstration. The organs of the body obey immutable laws, but in their obedience they serve the soul. However accurately we may determine their mechanism, yet we cannot unravel the mystery of the soul with its thoughts and will; and because we cannot see how the thought and the will set the members in motion, are we to doubt the existence of the soul? But I will not press this analogy. You will insist on some logical proof, and that I cannot give you. Every object is invested with gravitation.

The soul has its gravitation—and it gravitates towards God. Do you not feel a yearning, a hunger in your soul for some one infinite, ineffable Being in whom alone your spiritual nature will find its rest? I am sure you do. The nobler, purer, any soul is, the more does this unutterable craving gain in power. Well! the existence of this longing of the spirit does not demonstrate the existence of God, but it convinces, nevertheless.’

Ernestine fell into brooding thought. She merely remarked, “I could not have supposed it possible that a man like you should have faith.”

“I will tell you, then, how it is that Faith fastened itself in my heart. I was a giddy youth, just escaped from pious, childish dreams, but with a lively sense of my need of God. I had ceased to believe in Him as shewn me in religion, and I sought to find Him in science. Following this false direction I took up natural philosophy, and bewildered myself with the insoluble riddle of man’s existence and the evidences of God. My heart was warm, and I loved my relations, especially my little sister, Angelica. One day the child fell dangerously ill, and as I loved her above every one in the family, I insisted upon watching by her sick bed all night. The child suffered great pain, and her moans went to my heart. My mother and I stood by the crib not knowing what to do, so I felt on the brink of despair; I could find nothing which would ease the sufferings of the little darling. Then, all at once, my mother took Angelica’s small damp hands, folded them, and said, ‘Pray, my dear, pray to God to help you. He perhaps will hear you.’ The child gulped down a sob, and prayed, simply, ‘O my God, take away my pains, for Jesus’ sake!’ I fell on my knees and prayed with her. I do not know what I said, I do not know to whom I spoke, but the anguish of my soul found a voice, and saw some One to whom it could turn and with Whom plead. I heard my mother say, ‘*Amen*,’ to Angelica, and I responded also, without thinking. When the child ceased she became quieter, her eyes looked up with confidence towards heaven, then she smiled, nestled her little head into my arms, and fell asleep—fell asleep for

the first time after seven wakeful nights. I listened to her breath, which came evenly. And now emotion overcame me; tears trickled down my cheeks. My heart opened to embrace a world—no, not a world only—that would not have sufficed, I must have God as well. How can I explain my feelings? Like the girl in the poem who was born blind,—when she loved she believed she saw. So was it with me: now for the first time I *loved* God, the God to whom I had prayed in my blindness, and in this love I saw. The eyes of the soul are in the heart.”

He paused and looked at Ernestine, who listened with sympathy.

“This is the way with Faith,” he continued; “it comes not by argument. Reason will not give it. What neither philosophy nor natural science could teach me I learned in one moment of anguish. That God whom I sought in vain in the vast realms of thought I found at the bed of a child. From that moment I was humbled,—from that moment only did I become an exact physiologist. I no longer attempted to pass the limits of science and tread a region of metaphysics in the vain hope of there finding the solution of spiritual problems; but withdrew within the bounds of the knowable, and there I met with no antagonisms and contradictions to my faith. Where knowledge ends there faith begins.”

“What you say is interesting and well stated,” said Ernestine, sadly, “but it is not convincing.”

“I see that the words and experience of another will not convince you. I hardly supposed it probable, but I attempted it. Your own experience will do some day what mine has failed to accomplish in you. Let me assure you that the day must come in which will occur a moment of despair, in which suddenly your soul will cry out in an agony of longing for that God whom you do not now need. A woman who cannot pray is a moth without wings, a piteous object indeed. That you can go through life without faith, without the experience, at least, of the need of it, I will not believe, for no woman is without fear. Fear reveals God to the soul, either as a protector and

refuge, or as an avenger and judge. Are you likely to be an exception to a general rule?"

"I hope so," answered Ernestine, proudly; "I am not one of those feeble creatures who are scared at every shadow. I look boldly into every dark corner, and never find there any spirit, only cobwebs and dust. I fear nothing, and I feel no want of a God."

"You fear nothing?" exclaimed Johannes, as a sudden thought struck him. "Not even death?"

"Not even death!" repeated Ernestine, calmly. "I know that I have issued from the universal mass of matter, and am an articulation of the universal force, and that, my little span run, I shall drop back into the universal mass again. A personal existence is a particularisation of what was general, as the general electric force is particularised for one moment in one wire, but it speedily falls back again into the undefined. For long I have studied this great natural law, and have regarded my little existence as only one transformation and combination of matter among many: life as one manifestation of force correlated with a dozen others. When we contemplate ourselves in this light, it is wonderful how humble we become, and how readily we cast away our claims to personal immortality, and regard death as the necessary tribute we pay to Nature for the little loan of individuality allowed us."

"Indeed! So you suppose that this thought will console you, and stay you up when your foot is on the verge of the vast void of nothingness into which you must fall back—a void unlightened by a single hope, a single belief!"

"Yes, it will; of that I am satisfied."

"Even should you arrive at that dread bourne before your proper hour."

"I would not murmur at the measure dealt out to me by Nature."

"You would not, however, wilfully curtail this span?"

Ernestine looked at him with a startled expression in her eyes. "No, certainly not."

"Are you not afraid of doing this, if you go to America?"

"Of course not. The sea is more merciful than men; do you suppose I fear the voyage?"

"Then you still purpose departing, after all I have told you of your uncle?"

"I shall go *with* him or *without* him. I shall go."

"Then, God be my witness, I have done all in my power to save you. Now,—excuse me the harshness—there remains but one means untried, a terrible one, but I must not neglect it. Ernestine; if you go to New York, I fear the time is close at hand when you will need the full power of your physiological consolations to stay you up. You are nearer your death than you imagine."

If possible, Ernestine became paler than before. "What are your grounds for saying this?" she stammered.

"I will tell you, for there is no time now for sparing you." He looked at the clock. "I do not understand how it is that with all your knowledge and perception it should have escaped you that you are not only nervous and agitated, but seriously ill."

Ernestine looked at him with alarm.

"I am convinced that you are lost if you continue this sort of life, at full tension. And this you will have to do, if you go to America. However your uncle may have buoyed you up with hopes, I am satisfied that he will not spare your means any more in America than here in Germany,—that is, should I suffer him to go at large, which I have not the smallest intention of doing. You will have to work for your livelihood, and in your present shaken, over-excited, nervous state you have not the power to do this. If you try it on, then a twelvemonth will see the end of you. You will die in an American hospital, and be shovelled into a grave as Number so-and-so, to be scored off the books."

Ernestine turned her head aside.

"Are you still resolved to go?" asked Johannes, after a pause.

Ernestine, in her bitter need, tried to weigh matters. She felt he was right, but she felt also that she had no alternative. He did not know that all her fortune was gone, and that she would have, wherever she was, to work for her bread, and not spare herself, unless she would fall into the position of a beggar. She saw, well enough, that the

hospital was the only place she could look to as a last home. How much better then for her to sink into the earth in a foreign land than where she was known, than where Philistinism and Bigotry would dance a war dance over her grave, exultant at the accomplishment of their prophecies ! She must fly her native land. As the dying bird in winter creeps among the ivy leaves to hide its last throes, so would she take refuge where not known, and where she would be hidden, to cover her humiliation from the eyes of that proud man with whom she had measured arms in the day of her confidence.

After a while she raised her head, and said with constraint, "I have no alternative. I must fulfil my engagement. I must go to America."

Johannes had listened for her decision in breathless anxiety. Now his self-restraint gave way. "Ernestine !" he cried, and he grasped her by both shoulders, "Ernestine ! Do you hear ? This is a matter of life or death. I tell you, your only chance of recovery is for you to give up work entirely for awhile. And yet you rush headlong into an early grave. I have studied you with the eye of a doctor and of a lover, and I swear to you by my professional honour, I see daily more occasion for alarm on your account. You look like one on the point of going into a decline." He took her hand ; "You have now the feeble irregular pulse and the cold hand of one suffering from heart complaint. Willmers described your malady to me yesterday, and I recognised at once symptoms that cause me grave uneasiness. I hope and trust they are only premonitory symptoms warning you off a path sure to end in ruin. But, if neglected, they will turn to a mortal disorder. You must spare yourself or you will deliberately kill yourself. My conscience will not allow me to suffer you to start on your long journey without opening your eyes to the state of your health. If you had not resisted every other effort I have made for your salvation you would not have imposed on me this painful obligation. Have compassion on my anxiety for you, and, at least, consent not to start till you have called in Dr. Heim. He is an experienced physician—let him judge whether I am right or wrong in

my opinion. Do this one thing, this one thing only, Ernestine, or you will drive me frantic."

He still held her firmly, as though he wanted to restrain her by force. His breast heaved; the vehemence of a deep, manly passion burned in his heart, and blazed out in these authoritative acts and impetuous words.

Ernestine stood before him wan and silent. She bent somewhat under the weight of his hands, but no human eye could read what passed within her heart.

Whilst they thus stood looking into one another's eyes, a coach rolled off. Johannes did not notice it. Ernestine thought that perhaps her uncle was making his escape. It was indifferent to her. Everything was now indifferent to her.

"Ernestine! will you give me no answer?" asked Johannes.

"I will—consider. To-morrow you shall have an answer."

"God be praised!" broke from the depths of his heart.

He was constrained to let Ernestine go, and support himself on the back of a chair. His head swam.

A few minutes passed without either speaking.

"Ernestine!" said he presently, "In the hour that has just passed you have punished an innocent man for all the crimes of his race. Let it suffice you that I have been cruelly punished."

She said nothing.

Johannes went on. "I will no further trouble you; may I return with Dr. Heim?"

"You shall hear my answer to-morrow."

"Give me your hand. No!—then farewell."

Ernestine was alone. She remained rooted to the spot for some time. She did not think of her uncle, nor Johannes. One word rung in her ears, "You have the pulse of one suffering from heart complaint!" This fatal word had stung her like a scorpion. It was clear that Johannes saw she was past cure, but that he did not wish to tell her the whole horrible truth. He had softened it to her ears. But she had seen his conviction in his eyes. Was Möllner justified in thinking this? Yes, he was a medical man of

sufficient experience to form a diagnosis. She wondered that she had not given attention to these symptoms herself. He was right, her uncle was her murderer. She shuddered. The thought of the near approach of death curdled her blood.

She reckoned up all the little tokens of failing powers that had manifested themselves of late, and drew her own conclusions. It was remarkable how all tallied with what she knew of the symptoms of heart complaint. Johannes would not have urged a consultation with Dr. Heim unless he had thought her condition serious. But what could old Heim say which she did not already know? Had he drawn his knowledge from other sources than she? Had she not a pathological library which contained all that a doctor required, a library she had designed giving to Walter, but which was not yet sent him? She must examine the treatises on the heart, and satisfy herself at once.

It was night. The rain fell again. Dark shadows enveloped her. She rang for a light, and Willmers brought up a lamp with a green shade and withdrew.

Ernestine hurried to the book-case, placed a ladder against it and mounted it, holding the lamp in one hand. She sought hastily for a "Handbook of Pathology," and pulled out one volume after another without finding the right book. She looked impatiently among the dusty quartos which she had not touched for many months; at last she caught a glimpse of the title. The book lay under a pile of volumes heaped one on another ready for being packed. She was obliged to pull it out—she did so impetuously. The books collapsed and fell in an avalanche. A hard substance struck her on the head, nearly stunning her, then glanced on to the lamp, which it broke, and fell on the floor with a crash amidst broken glass. With tottering knees Ernestine descended the ladder, the book under her arm, and stooped to see what had fallen, by the glow of the expiring wick. Then she saw a grinning head showing its teeth, leering at her. She sprang back with a scream. It was a skull that had stood on the book-case, and had been forgotten. The wick went out; but still she thought she

saw the skull grinning at her, surrounded by a phosphorescent light, set in deepest darkness. With her nerves high wrought she flew to the bell-rope and rang for another lamp. When the light was brought she forced herself to look firmly at what had startled her. She put two fingers into the eye sockets, and said, as she raised the skull, "I shall look like this shortly, neither better nor worse." She went before a looking-glass, holding the head, and compared it with her own. "I must accustom myself by degrees to this family likeness," she said, and began gloomily to dissect her face, remove the skin and flesh and see herself like this bare, bony companion. But disgust and fear came over her, and she shrank from her own face in the glass, as from the skull. She threw the head from her, and then shuddered at the noise of its fall on the floor. The blood roared in her ears, so that she could hear nothing else, and yet was every moment thinking that she caught some unusual sound, which filled her with nervous fear. The death's head seemed not to lie at ease in the corner where it had fallen, but to be rolling about the floor. She could no longer endure the room. She took her book and went into her bed-chamber, without looking behind her, flying like a hunted fawn through the deserted rooms, fearing lest the skeleton should emerge from a dark corner, seeking for its head. Even in her own bedroom she found no repose. Her heart, her sick heart, beat aloud and irregularly. She opened the book and read her death-sentence,—she read the whole chapter on heart disease, she read in fever haste, scarce realizing what she read, for thought with her had become nothing save fear. And she read her own fears into her text, seeking what she feared to find, and finding what she feared. Not a symptom was there described which she did not know by experience. Without a shadow of doubt she was doomed, irremediably doomed; there was no cure for heart complaint, only a postponement of the fatal day. She flung the book from her and walked to the window to get a breath of fresh air,—even though the air was charged with rain,—that of the room smelt, tasted, like the atmosphere of a charnel-house. The breath of life was

sweet, while it might be drawn. In her coffin she would be denied it. She thought of the coffin-lid being screwed down over her face, and of suffocation beneath it.

She must die! So young, so soon! Johannes had not deceived her. How much time had she before her in which to gather up her courage and face the blank blotting out of life with composure? Did she fear death? What was there to fear? The pains she must undergo? Thousands had borne them, and worse than they. Perhaps the day of extinction of the vital spark was nearer than she anticipated. She felt weak, very weak. Her heart failed her, and yet she had told Johannes that she would not fear death. Only an hour was passed since she had made that proud boast, and already her courage was fluttering from her. She did not shrink from the *pain* of death, nor did she cling with passion to the life that was departing: it had not been bright and dear to her. Why, then, did she turn sick at soul at the thought? It was not the idea of annihilation that filled her with such dismay; it was the uncertainty in which she now felt whether after all death *was* extinction of all that constitutes man. What if the mind should live on after the death of the body! She said to herself,—When the eye is blinded no light can enter, when the ear is deafened no sound can penetrate. When all the mechanism of the body which serves as a means of communication with the outer world is brought to a stand-still, then, indeed, communication is arrested, but it does not follow that the mind, the spirit, has lost its power of thought. What if it can go on brooding on itself, in darkness and solitude? How horrible to think that this is possible! To retain memory, and a craving to know, and yet to see no more, to hear no more, to feel no more, to have no sensations, to be outside all space and time, in endless night, eternal silence, with the memory of the past haunting, of sights beheld, sounds heard,—with a yearning after light, and tones, and outer objects, but to be devoid of medium of perception!

The idea was so horrible, so much more horrible than annihilation, that her heart stood still with fright. She feared death—because she feared eternal darkness, silence, solitude.

This idea is enough to terrify one who has drunk his full of life's joys, and is ready to take his rest after a long and active life; how much more terrible must it have been to her, a girl, at the threshold of life, with hopes and ambition, and a vocation, all unfulfilled. O for certainty in this horrible doubt! O for escape from this ghastly fear! O for refuge in this agonizing distress! She cast herself on her knees.

"O almighty Nature, hard mother, who will no more nurse me in thy bosom—spare, spare, and save me thy child! Give not over this young eager mind to eternal paralysis, and its vessel to destruction! Tens of thousands breathe and flourish, who are not worthy to enjoy thy protection, and shall I, thy priestess, be thrust aside by thee!"

She lay long on the ground, wringing her hands, as expecting an answer, which she knew could not, and would not come. All was hushed about her, no token of pity shewed that her cry was heard. She recovered herself.

"Nature is inexorable," she sighed, "why should I pray to her? She hears me not, she thinks not, she feels not. Without concern she crushes me out of existence, with the blind indifference of an eternally-rotating mechanism. Is there no hand to be thrust among the wheels and arrest them a little space? No intelligent power which can weigh the value of an existence, and say, Thou art worthy to live, therefore live!—There must be! There is! In this hour of dire agony I feel it, there must be some higher and more righteous power, there must be some godhead greater than Nature. My spirit which now wrestles in death's grip with Nature, must have some other refuge; it must have some higher vocation than merely to live!" She pressed her hands to her bosom. "O Faith! Faith!—but if there be a God after all, what right have I to appeal to Him, I who have denied Him, and fought against Him? Wretched being that I am! How could my vain pride stand before such a judge? What have I done to deserve that God should pity me? Have I used the world for any good purpose, made any sufferers happy, linked any band, that I might plead for pardon and pity? Have I not laughed Him

to scorn and denied His power, and shut my eyes to His presence, all my life long, and now in my utter misery and desolation I cry out to Him! No! let me not deceive myself, I shall not find pity in Nature, or in men, or in God!"

Faith came on her in all its awfulness; for Faith is a loving friend to those who love it, but to those who repel it it comes as an avenger, shattering desolation like a thunder-storm. It caught away that sick soul, like a withered leaf from the tree of knowledge, and sent it whirling hither and thither in the night of despair.

One cry, one last piercing bitter cry burst from Ernestine's lips, "Johannes, help! help!" and staggering towards the door she fell unconscious her whole length on the floor.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

SENTENCED.

LEUTHOLD had listened to the conversation between Johannes and Ernestine till it had reached a point where he saw that Johannes would prevail. More than once he felt disposed to burst in on the interview, and endeavour to reassert his influence over Ernestine, but as often he abandoned the idea, under the conviction of his helplessness to defend himself against Möllner. Then his care for his own safety became the paramount object of his anxiety, and he resolved to make use of the opportunity then offered to effect his escape. Convinced that his game was lost, he gathered together the contents of his strong-box, and wrote a few lines to Ernestine, which he left in an envelope on his writing-table, to explain his absence when it was discovered. They ran thus :—

“I have listened to your conversation, and have heard the unfortunate turn it has taken. I can no longer cherish a hope, and my only chance of safety lies in taking advantage of the fellow’s presence with you, to effect my escape. I take with me whatever money I can lay my hands on to defray the expenses of the journey. I cannot await Möllner’s departure to ask you for it, as he would watch the door and I should not be allowed another chance of evasion. My life, and the welfare of my child are at stake, and delay is impossible. If you should still decide to leave with me to-day you will find me at the railway station. There are still two hours before the departure of the train. If you remain

I will send you the money for the journey as soon as I can. Farewell, but, as I trust, *au revoir*."

Having written this note, Gleissert slipped out to the stables, ordered the horses to be put into the carriage, and drove to the station. In two hours his fate would be decided. Once off in the train and he was safe.

Those hours to Ernestine, of mortal struggle with doubts and re-awakening faith, were to Leuthold also a season of torture. Anyone who has waited a couple of hours for the arrival of a train at some insignificant station knows the demands made on his patience. Who does not know the standing about on a desolate platform, stamping the feet to keep them warm, now peering into the dark along the level line of rail in hopes of discerning the red spark of the approaching engine, then pacing up and down the limited space, and asking the sleepy station-master as often as may be, how long before the train will be there, and receiving the stereotyped answer, "Presently;" then, for a change, a visit to the dreary refreshment-room with its leathery sandwiches and its faded waitresses, who regard you with an offensive indifference because you are not reduced by exhaustion to purchase any of their stale provisions? Who does not remember the interminable minutes, the incessant consultation of a creeping clock, that makes ten minutes out to half-an-hour? Who has not got a horrible familiarity with the stupefaction into which the traveller at length sinks, the dull resignation which after a while steepens his senses, out of which he is suddenly roused by the shrill whistle of the locomotive, causing an instant scramble for the seven parcels you have to carry, and a rush to the door, only to be checked by the porter with the information that this is not your train, and the consequent relapse into stupor? Who indeed has not undergone these experiences and felt them to be hateful? What then must they have been to Gleissert, who was waiting for the iron steed to bear him beyond pursuit?

Leuthold experienced these miseries to the utmost, with the added anxiety of having to watch two roads, that along which the train was coming to bear him off, and that along

which the avenger might be coming in pursuit of him. Thus he passed two hours on a mental rack, and when, at last, the red spark appeared in the distance, and the train rushed into the station, he felt as though his senses would fail him at the supreme emotion of relief from high strung fear. With all the strength he could muster he staggered into the carriage, and the black fiery-eyed guardian angel of criminals spread its smoky pinions and steamed away with him into the night.

Safety seemed assured. Upon the iron road, along which he was carried with such speed, no pursuit was possible, save through the electric spark, that might outstrip him and cause his arrest at some other station. But this fear did not trouble him greatly, for no one knew whether he had fled. To baffle pursuit he had taken a ticket for a distant town on the left bank of the Rhine, while he intended going direct to Hamburg, stopping first at Hanover to take his daughter from her boarding-school. It was a cold, disagreeable night. Overpowered by fatigue he fell asleep once or twice. He dreamed he was on mid-ocean in the cabin of a vessel, he breathed freely, his fears were at an end. His dream was rudely broken by the shout of the guard at his door, "Five minutes for refreshment!" and he was recalled to consciousness that he was still on dry land, and on that land where he was in no real safety. Thus the night passed in broken sleep. The other travellers looked compassionately at the pale, beardless man, leaning back so wearily in the corner, whose worn white face was feebly lighted by the flicker of the carriage-lamp, and thought he must be ill.

At last dawn flushed the horizon and revealed the uninteresting flat country. The usual beverage was offered at the stopping-places and drunk as coffee by the chilly travellers, who, in their physical exhaustion, asked only for something warm and did not complain at the stuff supplied them.

An old lady, who had got into the carriage during the night, and seated herself beside Leuthold, tipped hot coffee and chicory at every station. The pale man, who seemed

impervious to earthly needs, and leaned heavily and motionless in his corner, excited her curiosity.

What kind of man was this, who never stirred, never took any refreshment, never smoked, never spoke, not even to answer ordinary salutations. Nothing more readily breaks the ice between travellers together at night, than common discomforts. All the others had grown confidential, had stretched themselves, and described their sensations and dreams. Leuthold alone was as if deaf and dumb. As a matter of course the others leagued against him, watched him, and made whispered remarks on his appearance. At last he grew very uncomfortable. The restlessness of the old lady by his side troubled him; her huge fur cloak was continually getting in his way and overwhelming him. She informed him that she had brought it into the carriage with her because it would not go into her trunk, and now she was glad of it for it had proved a comfort. Who would have supposed that it would have been so chilly on a September night? However, now she must take it off, lest she should catch cold. She disentangled herself from the voluminous wrap almost smothering Leuthold in the process. The other gentlemen good naturedly assisted her, but Leuthold extricated himself impatiently. The cloak was at last, with considerable pains, rolled up and strapped together, and hung in the net above their heads, whilst the towers of the capital, looming unperceived in the morning light were being approached. The pains had been thrown away, for the guard opened the door with the words of release to Leuthold, "Tickets for Hanover, gentlemen!"

"Oh, good gracious! are we there already?" cried the old lady, rummaging in her pockets for her ticket, which Leuthold fortunately picked up from the floor and handed to her.

Appeased by this little act of courtesy she asked if he also were going to get out at Hanover, and when he replied in the affirmative, she informed him to his horror that she was going to take her youngest daughter from the boarding-school there, to establish her as companion with a lady in Copenhagen. She had a hard journey before her, for she

would continue it that very night. He at once made up his mind not to take the night train for Hamburg, as he had at first intended, since then he would have to travel all the way from Hanover in the society of this gossiping old woman and her daughter, who was probably a friend of his own Gretchen. It was incumbent upon him to have no companion to whom he might become known, and who could afford intelligence concerning his route to the police. Great as was the danger in delay, this peril was still greater. Better choose the lesser evil and lose a day. The train stopped. The old lady emerged from the carriage, like a mole from its burrow, and was greeted with joyful acclamations from her daughter, who was awaiting her at the station.

Leuthold threw himself into a cab and drove to a hotel, whence he despatched a few lines to his daughter, requesting her to come to him.

A long half-hour ensued. What would the daughter prove to be whom he had not seen for seven years? Was she what her letters promised? If she were, how should he meet her, and gaze into her innocent eyes?

There was a gentle knock at the door. "Come in," he cried, eagerly; and thereupon it opened, a lovely girl in budding maidenhood entered, and Leuthold extended his arms to her in mute delight.

The girl stood for one moment timidly on the threshold, and then threw herself upon her father's breast with a cry of joy,—a cry in which was summed the home-sickness of many years. Closer and closer each clasped the other. Neither could utter a word. The child wept tears of joy in her father's arms, and bitter drops fell from Leuthold's eyes upon the head that he pressed to his breast with passion, as though this happiness could last but the moment, and then must leave him for ever.

"Father, let me look at you," Gretchen said at last, extricating herself from his embrace. Then she put a hand on each side of his head, and gazed into his eyes with the clear, frank glance of innocence. He bore her look uneasily, as he might the sun. It dazzled him, and his eyelids fell.

"Father, dear, I can see how you have laboured and suffered," said Gretchen, sadly. "It was high time for you to allow yourself a little relaxation. How good it is of you to come to me—to me!" Her emotion found vent in kisses. "But how you have surprised me!" she exclaimed. "I could hardly believe my eyes when your note was handed me. I recognised your hand at once, but wondered that it should come from here. I opened the note and read in so many words that you really were here. I gave such a cry of delight as brought every one round me to know what was the matter. I was but just out of bed, and would gladly have run to you in my dressing-gown! I was so excited that I could hardly dress myself. Hooks and eyes and pins all went wrong. I should never have got ready had I not been helped. I was in such a mad hurry!" Then she laughed, and cried, and threw her arms round her father again, as if she feared to lose him. "Oh, my father! my own darling papa! is this really you at last? Are you now going to stay here awhile? Are you half as glad to see me as I am to see you?"

Then the innocent, joyous girl overwhelmed him with love and caresses; and he, lost as he was, heard his condemnation in every tender word she spoke.

Could this angel ever descend from her heavenly sphere to a knowledge of her father's crime? Could her pure spirit ever bear the stain of the knowledge of his sin, and shrink shuddering from him to whom she now clung as her dearest object in the world?

But this was not all he feared. What if his disgrace were to be visited on his child? What if this young bud should be buried under the ruins of his shattered existence? Who would have anything to do with the daughter of a criminal?

"I visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation!" These had been but empty words to him hitherto: now they stood out distinct and hard in his memory. They expressed the dread that now possessed him.

"Father, how silent you are?" said Gretchen, timidly.

"Oh, my child! I can do nothing but look at you with

delight! Your sweetness is to me a revelation from on high! I have become a new man since I have realized that I am the father of so dear a child. I cannot laugh and joke; my joy is too deep. Let me alone, and, believe me, the graver I am, the fuller is my joy and the more intense my love."

Gretchen at once understood and sympathized with her father's mood. "You are right," she said; "we do not laugh and joke in church, and yet there the heart sometimes overflows with gratitude and joy to God for His kindness. I thank Him now. I have prayed for this moment. I have prayed to Him for so many years to send you to me, and now my prayer is answered—you have come. His way is always the best. He has not sent you before because I was not old enough to appreciate this blessing!" Leuthold had seated himself by this time; and she stood beside him, and pillowed his head upon her breast. "You are worn out, dear father. You look so sad. But now you are mine, and I will tend you and cherish you till you forget all your troubles. Oh, that Ernestine! I do not wish her ill; but I would that she could restore to me every smile that she has stolen from you: I should value each as my greatest treasure." She imprinted on his forehead a kiss that burnt to his heart's core like a touch of fire.

"Do not let us speak of Ernestine now, my child," he said. "Let her be what she is. We will talk of her by-and-by. Of late she has been less stubborn, and has spoken of you with some kindliness. She will shortly marry, and then she will soften and become altogether better; for love ever ennobles. She has not quite decided on her future course; but I have little doubt that she will marry. At all events, should anything happen to me, you may look to her as a protector. I am sure you may do that. She will not disappoint me in that."

"Father!" exclaimed Gretchen, in alarm, "how can you talk so? What could happen to you?"

"My child, death might come suddenly on me. We must be prepared for everything. The future is in the hands of God."

Gretchen knelt beside him, and pressed her rosy lips on his thin hand. "Father, dear, why do you cast a shadow across this happy hour? Just as I have found you, you talk of my losing you. You are indeed in God's hand; but He who has brought you to me will, I trust, preserve you to me." She laid her head on his knee with childlike tenderness, and was silent.

"I visit the sins of the fathers upon the children!" rang again in the ears of the happy yet miserable father. Thus several hours passed, amid the girl's loving talk and merry jests, until at last, at noon, she sprang up and declared she must go back to school to dinner. Leuthold would not allow this. He said that her mistress would not expect her; that she would make sure Gretchen would stay with her father. So they dined together, for the first time after many years. But to Leuthold the meal was like that partaken of by the criminal before execution.

After dinner he went to see the mistress of the school, and asked her to allow him to take Gretchen a pleasure-trip of a few weeks—a request that was readily granted, although the mistress declared that she could not tell how she should do without Gretchen for so long. "I assure you," said she, "that your daughter has richly rewarded us for the trouble we have taken with her. When she finally leaves me, she will carry away with her a large piece of my heart."

"Oh, how can I thank you?" cried Gretchen, throwing herself into the arms of her kind friend.

Leuthold was troubled. Should he snatch this child from the soil into which she had struck root so deeply, and where she had blossomed so fairly in the sunshine of peace and good will? And yet could he leave her here with the chance of losing her for ever? If justice should pursue him to America, he could not send for his daughter without betraying his place of refuge. She was his child. He had a sacred claim upon her, and, since he had seen her again, he felt himself less able than ever to do without her. She should share his fate.

While he was in the parlour of the institute the old lady entered who had been his travelling companion, and who

had passed the whole day with her daughter. She professed herself charmed to meet him again, and regretted that they were not to continue their journey together that evening.

The schoolmistress invited him to return to tea,—an invitation that he could not refuse,—and he left the house for awhile for a walk with Gretchen. The girl's delight knew no bounds when she found herself promenading the streets upon her father's arm. She had on her prettiest bonnet and her best dress,—she wished to be a credit to her father and to please him, and she entirely succeeded. She was charming. Leuthold regarded her with increasing admiration, and his busy mind began to weave fresh plans for the future out of her brown hair and long eye-lashes. The world stood open for this angel,—might she not pass scathless through it with a father who had been proscribed? Who could withstand those half-laughing, half-pensive, gazelle-eyes, and those pouting lips pleading for a father?

As she walked beside him thus, her elastic form lightly supported upon his arm, prattling on with all the grace of a nature full of sense and sensibility, he too began to smile and to revive. He might be wretched as a man, but he was enviable as a father.

Gretchen interrupted his reverie. "Father," she said, in a low voice, "when I was a little child you never liked to have me speak of my mother. But I want very much to know what became of her after she married that head-waiter. Will you tell me to-day?"

"I can tell you nothing,—I know nothing of her since she left Marburg, after her father's death. At the time of the divorce she sent me the sum that she was bound to contribute towards the expenses of your education, and her vulgar husband permitted no further correspondence between us. He sent back to me my letters unopened when I wrote on business. I learned through a third person that she had left Marburg. I do not know where she is living now."

Gretchen shook her head and said nothing.

"I look like you, father, do I not?" she asked, anxiously. She did not want to resemble her faithless mother in anything.

"You inherit her beauty, but refined and ennobled, and my way of thinking and feeling."

Gretchen nestled close to his side. "I should like to grow more like you every day."

"God forbid!" Leuthold thought to himself, in the full consciousness of what he was, as he turned to go back to the institute. Oh! that he could have retraced his steps in the path of life!

The evening passed more slowly than it would if he had been alone with Gretchen, though he was pleased by fresh proofs of her ability and progress. He was especially surprised by her artistic talent, manifest in her drawings and water-colour sketches. She had not exaggerated when she wrote to him that she was as capable as any girl of earning her own livelihood. He was perfectly satisfied upon that point. And as he lay down to rest at night, a sense of relief filled his mind greater than any he had felt for a long time, and it soothed him to repose.

The next morning Gretchen heard, to her surprise, that her kind father desired to give her a glimpse of the sea. He would wait until they were on board of the steamer, he thought, before telling her his real plans. They took the early train for Hamburg, and arrived there towards evening. Leuthold thought it advisable to go directly to a large hotel, as less likely there to excite observation as in a smaller house. He selected one of the grandest hotels in the gayest street in Hamburg.

Gretchen was enchanted with the sight of this northern Venice. The extensive basin of the Alster lay before them, framed in hundreds of lights; on its bank was the brilliantly illuminated Alster Pavilion. The rippling waves reflected the moonbeams in a path of shining silver. Like pictures in a magic lantern, the gondolas glided hither and thither, and the fresh sea-breeze wafted the notes of gay music from the further side. The waves of this sea of light and sound broke harmoniously upon Gretchen's eyes and ears, and made her giddy with delight. She could almost believe that the Nixies, scared to their depths during the day by the passage upon the waters of so much life, were now begin-

ning to sport there in the moonlight, playing around the skiffs and singing their enticing strains. And when she turned her eyes to the shore, bordered by palaces and crowded with restless throngs of pedestrians and gay equipages, presenting a scene of reality that contrasted with the dreamy mystery of water, the world seemed to the child a garden of enchantment, and her father the mighty magician reigning over it, who had brought her hither to enjoy its splendours. She threw her arms around him and kissed his hands, and could not thank him sufficiently for giving her such delight.

The carriage stopped at the entrance of the magnificent hotel, and the attendants came running to offer their services. The head-waiter stood in the doorway, ready to receive the new arrivals. Leuthold helped out Gretchen and handed over the baggage to a servant. As he ascended the steps, he glanced for the first time at the dignified and trim deputy of the host. He started, and the man also was evidently startled. Each seemed to know the other's face; one moment of reflection, and the recognition was mutual. Leuthold held fast by Gretchen, or he would have staggered. In that head-waiter he recognised Bertha's husband.

They exchanged a hostile glance of recognition. Then the man cried with a perfectly unconcerned air, "Louis, show Dr. Gleissert and his daughter to Nos. 42 and 43."

It seemed to Leuthold that the servant smiled at the mention of his name, and that he exchanged a significant glance with his superior. But this was probably only an illusion of his excited fancy. He hesitated whether it would not be better to go to another hotel. But that would look like flight,—he had been recognised, and, if the man chose to pursue him, he could follow him to any inn in Hamburg.

His enemy stood aside with a contemptuous obeisance, and Leuthold followed his guide up to the fourth story. "Have you no room in a lower story?" he asked.

"Very sorry, Sir," replied the servant with a smile, "they are all occupied—you have a very good view here of the river."

Leuthold was silent. The sensation came over him as if

he had fallen into a trap. By what piece of ill luck had he happened in this wide city to choose the very house where dwelt his worst enemy? How did the fellow come there?

The servant Louis opened a charming room, looking out upon the water, and Gretchen could not suppress an exclamation of delight as she looked down from such a height upon the beauty below them. It seemed like heaven to her. Louis lighted the candles, and awaited further orders.

"How long has Herr Meyer been head-waiter here?" Leuthold asked, as if incidentally.

"For about a year," Louis replied, arranging his napkin upon his arm. "He is a relative of the proprietor of this house, who, when his only son died, sent for Herr Meyer, that the business might not pass into strange hands."

"Indeed—then Herr Meyer will succeed him?"

"I believe so,—yes, Sir."

Leuthold walked to and fro upon the soft carpet.

"Will you have supper, Sir?"

"Yes."

"Will you go down to the saloon, Sir?"

"No, I had rather not have to mount four flights of stairs again. Bring our supper here, if you please."

"Very well, Sir, I will get you the bill of fare instantly."

"Here—stop a moment——"

"What do you wish, Sir?"

"Bring me a couple of newspapers at the same time."

"Very well, Sir."

As the door closed behind the man, Gretchen turned round from the window, where she had been standing with clasped hands. "Father," said she, "I am fairly dazzled with all that I see. I never was so happy in my life before. But, in the midst of it all, I never forget whom I have to thank for all this pleasure." And she knelt upon the carpet and laid her head upon the lap of her father, who had flung himself exhausted into a chair. "Do not you, too, father, feel easy and free up here in the pure, clear air, with this lovely view of the shining water?"

"Oh, yes, dear child," said Leuthold, his breast filled the while with deadly forebodings.

Gretchen sprang up again, and took two or three deep breaths. "Oh," she cried, running to the window again, "it seems to me that I have been thirsty all my life, and am now drinking deep refreshing draughts in looking at those rolling waves." She leaned her fair forehead against the window-frame, and eagerly inhaled the fresh breeze that blew into the room from the Alster. "How happy those are who are at home upon two elements," she continued, "on land and water! We, poor land-rats, must cling to the soil. Think of inhabiting all four elements, now working and walking upon the earth, then soaring aloft into the air, now floating dreamily upon the waves, then dancing in the glow of fire,—would not that be glorious?"

"Then you would be man, fish, bird, and salamander all at once," said Leuthold, smiling in surprise at the girl's earnest tone. "Well, well, it might be all very delightful at sixteen, but a man as aged as your old father is thankful if he can live respectably upon the earth only."

"My old father!" laughed Gretchen, hastening to his side again—"you darling papa, how can you call yourself aged? Come with me to the window, the prospect thence will make you twenty years younger." She drew him towards it. "It is very strange, I think, but certainly it seems to me that a new revelation of beauty ought to make the old younger, and age the young. It is a new experience for the young, and experience ripens. It is a memory for the old, for they are sure to have seen something of the kind in previous years, and it carries them back to the early sensations it first awakened in them. Such a memory should relieve the soul of ten years at least."

Leuthold looked at his daughter with unfeigned surprise. "Child, where did you learn all this?"

"Why, out of some book that I have read, I suppose," said Gretchen modestly. "Old saws will pop up in one's head at odd times, you know."

"Blessed be the day that gave you to me,—you are all that I have."

A knock at the door, and the servant entered with the bill of fare and the newspapers.

"Excuse me, sir, for keeping you waiting. I had to go to Madame for to-day's paper."

"No matter," said Leuthold almost gaily. His talk with his daughter had done him good.

He ordered a little supper, and when the man left the room, seated himself on a sofa and began to read.

Gretchen took her work—she was just at the age when affection finds pleasure in embroidering or knitting some article for the beloved object. So she sat and sewed diligently a letter-case that she was embroidering for her father while he read. Now and then she turned and looked out of the window, to be sure that all the splendour there had not vanished.

Suddenly she was startled by a profound groan from her father, and, looking up, she saw him sitting, pale as ashes, staring at the paper that had fallen from his hands. Next moment he sprang to his feet, and walked up and down the room in mute despair.

"What is the matter, dear, dear father—what is it?" she asked, in alarm; but, receiving no reply, she picked up the newspaper, to see if she could discover from it what had caused his agitation. Unobserved by him she read—he was leaning out of the window for air—what seemed to her a strange tongue, to be deciphered only in her heart's blood. It was a telegraphic order from the magistrate of N—. "Dr. Leuthold Gleissert, formerly Professor at Marburg, is charged with having embezzled the property, amounting to upwards of ninety thousand thalers, of his ward Ernestine von Hartwich, of Hochstetten, also with having committed forgery, and with having robbed the post-office. His arrest and detention are required." A personal description of him followed; but Gretchen had read enough. "Father!" she screamed, "father! father!" And, as if in these three words she had summed up all there was to say, she fell forward with her face upon the floor, stunned by terror and dismay.

There stood the guilty man, forced to behold his child crushed beneath the ruins of his shattered existence. He did not venture to touch the guileless form extended before

him in anguish. He looked down upon her like one almost bereft of reason. God had visited his sin upon him, probing the only place in his heart sensitive to human feeling—his punishment lay in the sight of his child's agony without his having the power to relieve it.

Suddenly Gretchen raised her head and looked at him with those clear, conscious eyes whose gaze he had always endured with difficulty, and before which his own eyes now drooped instantly. "It is not true—it cannot be! Father, you are innocent—you cannot have done this thing!"

"For God's sake, Gretchen, do not speak so loud," Leuthold entreated.

"You tremble—you will not look at me. Father, if you have thus burdened your soul, I cannot be your judge—I will be your conscience. I will not let you enjoy a single hour of rest or sleep until you have restored what does not belong to you. I will die of hunger before your eyes rather than taste a morsel that is not honestly earned. But what am I saying? I am beside myself! It is not possible! Relieve me from my misery by one word. My soul is in darkness, cast one ray of light into it." She clasped his knees imploringly. "Father, swear to me that you are innocent——"

"My child——"

She interrupted him. "No; no oath—there is no need of that between us. Give me a simple Yes or No, and I will believe you! Look at me, father,—oh, look at me! Do not speak, do not even say Yes or No,—let me but look into your eyes, and my doubts will disappear."

"Gretchen," whispered Leuthold, trying to extricate himself from her clasping arms, "listen to me!"

"No, father, no, I will not let you go. I want no explanation, no argument. If you have committed this crime, nothing can extenuate it. I will hear nothing, know nothing, but whether you have committed it or not." She sought, in childlike eagerness, to meet his eye—she unclasped her arms from his knees to seize his hands and cover them with kisses, while a flood of tears relieved her heart. "Forgive me, forgive me for daring to speak thus to you. Oh, God!

how unworthy I am of your affection! The false accusation invented by evil men led me astray, and I dared to ask if you were innocent! Forgive me, my kind, patient father—see, I will not ask you again; I will not even look inquiringly into your eyes. The touch of your hand—this dear, faithful hand—suffices to reassure me, and lead me back to the knowledge of a daughter's duty." And she laid her face, wet with tears, upon his hands, with a touching humility that cut him more deeply than any accusations could have done.

"There—that's quite enough!" abruptly said a voice behind them,—a voice that curdled the blood in Leuthold's veins. "I will teach you a daughter's duty!" And from the doorway of the adjoining room Bertha's stout figure was visible boldly advancing.

"Good God, my mother!" shrieked Gretchen, and she recoiled involuntarily.

"Gretel," said the woman, "are you afraid of your mother, while you are on your knees to that villain?"

Leuthold stepped between her and his child. "Bertha," said he, "it seems to me my punishment is sufficient. Surely you need not avenge yourself by snatching my child's heart from me,—a heart that you never prized, and never will win. If there be a particle of maternal tenderness in your breast, spare, not me, but this innocent. Do not destroy the most precious possession of a youthful heart,—confidence in a father. Bertha, Bertha, you will harm my daughter more than me! Give heed to your maternal heart, which must beat quickly at the sight of this fair flower, and spare me a blow that would crush her."

Bertha folded her arms, and looked upon Leuthold with exceeding disdain. "Oh! now it is your turn to beg. I am no longer rude, clumsy, and coarse, as when you drove me off because I was too awkward to help you to steal the inheritance!"

"Bertha!" cried Leuthold, pointing to Gretchen, whose imploring eyes were turning from one parent to the other in increasing distress.

"I don't care; she shall hear it all! She shall know what a

precious papa she has got, and that you are not unjustly accused in the newspapers. Why should you hesitate to commit the crime wherewith you are charged, when you would have beggared Ernestine as a child by persuading old Hartwich to make you his heir? There is nothing you are not up to. I can tell Gretel that,—I, your wife, who lived with you for years. And your child shall curse you, instead of adoring you as a saint. No one can tell what a fine market you might have made of her if you had once got off to America with such a pretty girl.”

At these words Gretchen uttered a loud shriek.

Bertha pitilessly continued, “And just because I have maternal feeling enough to try to save my child, I will prevent your evil designs. You shall not carry the poor thing away with you to such a life as yours,—not while I live!”

“Bertha!” cried Leuthold, forgetting all caution, “hush, or mischief will be done here!”

“What mischief? Will you try to throttle me, as you did when Hartwich made Ernestine his heir instead of you? Only lay a finger on me! There is a police-officer outside in the passage, whom my husband placed there, to help Louis to attend to you.”

“Great God!” gasped Gretchen, staggering as if mortally wounded.

“Is it really so? Has your mean desire for revenge degraded you to this?” asked Leuthold, still incredulous.

“It was not I who sent for him, but my husband, who owes you a grudge because I played him false and married you. A gentleman came here this morning with the head of police to search this house, as well as all the other hotels in the city, and left orders that if you arrived here he was to be informed of it. My husband sent for him, and, for greater security’s sake, for a police-officer too. I don’t care a snap of the finger for you, but I will take poor Gretel under my protection when her father is arrested.” She approached the girl, who fled like some frightened animal to the farthest corner of the room.

“Keep off!” she cried, trembling in every limb. “Do

not touch me! You can do nothing for me now but kill me, and put an end to the agony you have brought upon me."

She burst into a piteous fit of sobbing. No one observed that the door had been gently opened, and that a young man was standing upon the threshold, regarding the unfortunate girl with the deepest compassion.

"My child," said Leuthold, going timidly up to her, "my child, will you not listen to one word from your unworthy father?"

"Do not speak, father. What good can it do? I cannot believe you any more,—cannot save you,—cannot, although I would so gladly do it, wash away your guilt, even with my heart's blood. I can only weep for you."

"Forgive an entire stranger for intruding upon such grief," said the gentleman, who now entered, in a voice trembling with pity. "I am compelled by cruel circumstances to appear as an enemy, when I would gladly act the part of a friend and comforter." He turned to Bertha. "May I entreat you to leave us a few minutes alone?"

She went out grumbling.

"Herr Gleissert," he continued, "My name is Hilsborn. Do not start. I am not come to avenge my father. His sainted spirit would disdain revenge. He forgave you freely while he lived. I come in place of my friend Möllner, who is detained by the illness of your niece, to vindicate her rights. We learned from Frau Willmers that you had sent your effects to Hamburg *poste-restante* several days ago, and that you would of course be obliged to come hither to reclaim them. Möllner requested me to pursue you without delay, and, without one thought of personal revenge, I consented to assist my friend in reinstating your unfortunate ward in her rights. I little knew what my acceptance of this duty would cost me, for the few minutes that I lingered on the threshold have taught me that my task is not only to hand you over to justice, but to deprive a daughter of her father."

"You shame me, Sir, by such kindness at a moment when a less generous man would have believed himself justified in

heaping insult upon me. I am the more grateful to you since you, of all others, have most reason to hate me. Your humanity, under these sad circumstances, relieves me with regard to the fate of my unfortunate child, for it emboldens me to hope that you will extend your chivalrous kindness to her also."

"Rely upon it, I will do so," Hilsborn assured him.

"And, let me hope, my child, that you will not reject the noble protection thus offered you. Herr Hilsborn, remember, has done your father no wrong,—he has only, in his natural desire for justice, lent his aid to the hand that is pursuing me. I presume," continued he, turning to Hilsborn, "that you have provided for my immediate arrest?"

"Yes, Herr Gleissert," said Hilsborn, gently; "the superintendent of the hotel has assisted me in doing so."

"Then I will place no unnecessary obstacles in your way. I shall submit to the investigation with a good conscience."

Hilsborn laid his hand lightly upon Leuthold's arm. "Herr Gleissert, do not reject advice that is well meant." He spoke in a whisper, that Gretchen, who was listening with feverish eagerness, might not hear what he said.

"Well?" asked Leuthold.

"Do not attempt denial, you will only weaken your case. The proofs of your crime are most conclusive."

"How so?" asked Leuthold, quietly, believing that he had destroyed every scrap of paper that could criminate him.

"On the evening of your flight, a letter was received from a former maid of Fräulein Hartwich's, who travelled in Italy with you, demanding immediate payment of her yearly stipend, for which she had written several times in vain. She reminds you, Herr Gleissert, of what she did for you,—how she worked sometimes all night long, trying to imitate Fräulein von Hartwich's signature, that she might be able to counterfeit her successfully before the notary. In short, the letter proves beyond a doubt that you deceived the notary by substituting the person as well as the signature of

the maid for those of your ward, so as to extricate the estate of your niece from the wardship of the Court of Chancery."

Leuthold stood before the young man pale and mute. Hilsborn saw the terrible agony of his soul.

"I do not tell you this to humiliate you, or to increase your pain, but only to warn you, that you may not lose time by setting up a false defence, and perhaps thereby deprive yourself of the sympathy sure to await a man of your culture who makes frank and remorseful confession of his guilt."

Leuthold's lips quivered at these well-meant words. "Have steps been taken to secure the person of the maid?" he inquired, in the tone in which he would have asked, "How long have I to live?"

"Professor Möllner telegraphed immediately to O——, the girl's present place of abode, and just before I left he received intelligence that she had been placed under arrest. The notary also has been summoned. Be assured that, as your arrest has been conducted with the greatest foresight, no measures will be neglected to insure your conviction. The only course left for you is to endeavour to secure the sympathies of the jury."

"I thank you," said Leuthold.

Gretchen had been standing leaning against the window-frame, and had understood more than Hilsborn had intended that she should. The waters of the Alster were still rolling below her, the lights were sparkling, and, in the terrible silence that now ensued, the music of the waltzes in the pavilion could be plainly heard. Was it possible that there was no change outside, while the world was crumbling in pieces around her?

Again the door opened, and several figures appeared. Everything swam before Gretchen's eyes; her heart beat as though every throb were its last. An officer of police entered; "Excuse me, Sir," he said to Hilsborn, "I cannot wait any longer."

Leuthold looked towards the door. Two policemen were standing outside, along with Bertha and her husband. Other figures also appeared in the brilliantly lighted hall,

inmates of the house, eager to witness the arrest. And was he to be led through all that gaping, staring crowd? He, who, with all his crimes, had always preserved appearances—was he at last to be held up to public contempt, dragged through the lighted passages and down the staircases by policemen, like a common thief? Of course there would be an eager crowd below, and another upon his arrival at N——. His only road now lay between long rows of curious faces, lining the path he must tread, from examination to examination, from disgrace to disgrace,—he, a man who had always preserved outward respectability,—until he should end his days either in a convict's coat or into the strait-jacket of a madman! The time for reflection was over. He turned a little, only a very little, aside, and drew a folded paper from his pocket,—it did not take a moment, no one observed the motion. It was easy to put his hand to his lips and swallow the powder that the paper contained, far easier than to pass through the brilliant hall, through that muttering, staring mob, to the police-court, and thence to a jail! An instant, and it was done. The powder had a bitter taste, and he drank a glass of water to remove it from his tongue. Then he stepped up to Gretchen, who was upon her knees, her face buried in her hands. Gretchen," he said almost inaudibly, "forgive your unhappy father!"

"Father? Almighty God, I have no father!" burst from the lips of his tortured child.

Leuthold looked at her with dim eyes. "I am condemned!" was all he could say.

Then he turned to the officers. "Gentlemen, at such a moment as this, it is surely natural for a father to provide for the future of those whom he may leave behind him. I am ill, and may die at any moment. In case of my decease, therefore, I appoint before all these witnesses, Professor Hilsborn to be my daughter's guardian, as I hold her mother unfit in every respect to be her guide and protector. The fact of her having forsaken her daughter at a tender age, and never troubling herself to inquire concerning her afterwards, will prove the justice of what I say. I pray you, gentlemen, to attest the validity

of this, my last will, when the hour for doing so arrives. Observe that I am at present in full possession of my mental faculties."

The by-standers looked at him in amazement. Bertha would have spoken, but her husband restrained her.

The officer said, coldly but politely, "Your directions shall receive due attention, if necessary. Rely upon it."

"You have no objections to make?" Leuthold asked of Hilsborn.

"Your wish shall be sacred to me," the young man assured him.

"And now, Sir, I beg for one great favour," Leuthold whispered to the officer. "Grant me one half-hour's delay."

"I am sorry to have to refuse, but I have waited too long already."

"Only one half-hour, Sir,—for the love of Heaven, then—a quarter of an hour!" Leuthold pleaded. The poison was beginning to work. His knees trembled, his grey eyes were glassy in their sockets, his features grew rigid.

"Not a minute longer!" the officer replied impatiently, and beckoned to the police.

"Have some pity!" the tortured man gasped to Hilsborn.

"I have taken poison. For humanity's sake induce him to let me die here with my child."

"Good God!" exclaimed Hilsborn. "Let instant aid be——"

Leuthold clutched his arm, and, with a ghastly smile, whispered, "It will be of no use, my friend!"

Hilsborn was horror-struck. "Sir," he said to the constable, "I unite my entreaties to those of Herr Gleissert. Allow him to remain here only until I have spoken with your superior."

"If the arrest is unjust, it will soon be at an end. I have nothing to do with that. I must obey orders."

Hilsborn whispered a few words in his ear, but he shrugged his shoulders. "Any man could say that. We will stop at a physician's as we drive past. I can't go against my orders. We must be off!" The policemen entered.

Hilsborn whispered to Leuthold, "I will bring you an antidote. I hope, for your child's sake, that you will take it. God have mercy on you!"

Leuthold would have replied, but a spasm prevented him from uttering a word.

Hilsborn saw that the poison had already entered the blood, and that all aid would come too late. Nevertheless, he resolved to do what he could. In passing, he lightly touched Gretchen's shoulder. "Fräulein Gleissert, your father is going. Say one word to him."

Gretchen started, as if from a swoon, looked around her, and saw Leuthold between the officers. "Father!" she shrieked, and rushed towards him. She clasped him in her arms, and pressed kiss after kiss upon his blue lips. Her cries wrung the souls of the by-standers, and Bertha hurried away, that she might not hear them.

"I take back what I said," Gretchen moaned. "How could I say I had no father? Now that I am going to lose you, I feel that my place is at your side."

Leuthold writhed in agony in her embrace, but he managed to speak once more. "My child," he gasped thickly, "if there be a God, may He bless you! and when you hear that your father took his own life, remember that fortune, freedom, honour, were gone past recall, but that by his own act he at least avoided a public exposure. He kept up appearances."

Gretchen gazed at him speechless. She tried to reply, but her lips refused her utterance. She only knew that her father was taken from her, and that stranger hands loosened her frantic clutch of his garments. She heard footsteps retreating, a door closed, and there was silence. For a few moments she lost consciousness. But other noises roused her from the fainting-fit that had brought her repose from grief, and recalled her to herself. Were the footsteps approaching? Yes, they came on to the door of her room. What a strange murmur rolled on with them! She raised her weary head with mingled fear and hope.

The door was thrown open as wide as it could go. Four men entered, bearing a well-nigh senseless burden. Her

father had returned to her, indeed—but how? They laid him upon the bed. Gretchen would have thrown herself into his arms, but he thrust her from him convulsively, for her clasping arms, her loving kiss, were torture too great to be borne. He tried to speak, but in vain. Amidst frightful spasms, alternating with utter exhaustion, he breathed his last sigh, and his spirit bore its burden of guilt to new, unknown spheres of existence.

He had avoided all public exposure. He had kept up appearances.

But the only judge that he had acknowledged upon earth,—his child,—lay crushed at his feet expiating the crimes of the condemned. What he had feared had come to pass:—The sin of the father was visited on the child.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORPHAN.

DAY was again mirrored in the waters of the Alster, and again the streets swarmed with life. The prattle and laughter of children on their way to school, the monotonous cries of the street-hawkers, the rattle of passing vehicles, were all borne aloft into the quiet room where Leuthold had died, and where Gretchen still knelt beside the bed, and, by her constantly recurring bursts of grief, showed that the long night had not sufficed to exhaust the fountain of her tears. Her head lay upon the edge of the bed, and her arms were stretched across the empty mattress,—for the host had insisted upon the immediate removal from his house of the body of the suicide. But Gretchen could not yet be induced to leave the desolate room, the vacant couch. Since she was not allowed to follow her father's corpse, she would at least pillow her head where he had lain. She repulsed all her mother's advances. When everything had been done that the law requires in such terrible cases, and the officials had vacated the apartment, she shot the bolt of the door behind them, and thanked God that she was alone with her misery, alone by her father's death-bed.

What human eye can pierce the depths of a young heart lacerated by such anguish? All that takes place in the soul at such moments, when the creature wrestles with its Creator, must remain a profound mystery,—a mystery known to almost every human being, but never to be exposed: for no mortal language can declare the revelations God makes to us in our direst need. Experience alone can enlighten us, and those who have lived through such a time can clasp the hand of a fellow-sufferer, and say, "I know

what it is." Thenceforth a bond is knit between them that is none the less close because it is inexplicable.

Thus was it with Gretchen and Hilsborn when the low knock of the latter at the door roused the girl from her grief, and she arose from her knees and admitted him. She put her hand in that he held out to her, and looked confidently into his serious blue eyes.

"You have not been to bed, dear Fräulein Gleissert," said he. "I can see that."

"How could I rest?" she replied. "They would not even let me watch by his body. All that I could do was to watch and pray for him here where he drew his last breath. How hard it is to have to leave what one has loved so dearly, and not to be allowed to cling to it at least until it is consigned to the earth! What if he were not quite dead! If he should stir, no one would be near to fan the spark of life into a flame. If he should open his eyes once more and find himself alone, and then die in helpless despair—Oh, the thought is madness!"

"I can assure you, Fräulein Gleissert," said Hilsborn quietly, "that your father sleeps peacefully. I did what you were not permitted to do,—I spent the night by his body."

"Could you do this for the man for whom you felt no regard?" cried Gretchen.

"I did it for you. I could imagine all you felt, and I knew it would be some comfort to you this morning to know that I had done it."

"Oh, how can I thank you, Sir? I am too childish and insignificant to thank you as I ought. My heart is filled with gratitude that will not clothe itself in words! You watched by my father out of pure humanity,—compelled by no duty, no obligation,—only in order to soothe the grief of a poor orphan. I cannot express what I feel. You must know—" She could go no further. Tears gushed from her eyes. She took his hand, and, before he knew what she was doing, had imprinted upon it a fervent kiss.

"Fräulein Gleissert!" cried Hilsborn, in great embarrassment. And a deep blush overspread his cheeks.

Gretchen never dreamed that she had committed an impropriety,—how could she, at such a moment? And Hilsborn knew this, and would not shame her by hastily withdrawing his hand. She was still but a child, in spite of her blooming maidenhood, and the kiss was prompted by the purest impulse of her heart.

“You reward me far more richly than I deserve,” he said softly. “Although it is long since I suffered the same sorrow, I know what it is. Grief for the death of my father never deserts me. Sorrow finds sympathy with sorrow, and you are more to me in your affliction than any of the gay, laughter-loving girls of my acquaintance. Let me do what I can for you,—it will be done with my whole heart,—and, for your own sake, do not give way to grief. Remember,—it is melancholy consolation, nevertheless, it is a consolation,—that it was far better for him to die before his crime brought its dreadful consequences. His home could never again have been among honourable men. What, then, would have become of you? Believe me, it is better as it is!”

“Do you think, then, my father does not deserve these tears? I know how great his offences were, and that every one is justified in condemning him,—every one but his child,—I cannot blame him. Do you think I ought not to grieve for him as I should for an honourable father? Ah, Sir, is it less sad to lose a father thus, just as I was reunited to him; to find that he whom I so revered was a criminal, and to have him vanish in his sin before I could even breathe a prayer to God for mercy upon him? Whatever he may have done, I must mourn for him all the more, for he was and always will be my father. And there never was a kinder father. Let others curse his memory, I can only mourn for him. If the holy words are true, ‘With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,’ I must give him nothing but love, for he never meted to me anything else. Do not despise me. I do not feel his guilt the less, although I cannot love him less.”

Hilsborn looked down at her with admiration. “How can you suppose that I could despise this sacred filial

affection? I respect you all the more for it. It reveals in you treasures of womanly tenderness! Most certainly he who had such a daughter, and knew how unworthy he was of her, is doubly to be pitied. I will not try to console you. You have in yourself a richer consolation than any that human words can give. What can a stranger such as I am say to you, or be to you? I can only stand by ready to protect and advise you, should you need advice or protection."

"If you will be so kind as to direct my first steps in the life that lies untried before me, my poor father will bless you from beyond the grave."

She paused, startled, for the door opened hastily, and Bertha entered. She regarded her daughter with satisfaction, but she awoke aversion only in her child. Bertha's beauty had been of a kind that endures only for a season, and then gradually becomes a caricature of its former self. Her fresh colour had turned to purple. Her mouth had grown full and sensual, with a drooping under-lip. Her sparkling black eyes had receded behind her fat cheeks, and assumed an expression of low cunning. An immense double chin and a round, waddling figure added to the coarseness of her appearance. This was the woman who stood ready to claim affection from a daughter whose education had taught her disgust at her mother's chief characteristic—vulgarity. What was this woman to her? She had heard that she was her mother, but she had never felt it. She had not seen her since she was scarcely five years old. She could feel no stirring of affection towards her. She could hardly connect her with the image in her mind of her father's faithless wife. While she was thus regarding Bertha with aversion, the man entered the room whom she was henceforth to consider in the light of a father,—her mother's second husband.

Involuntarily Gretchen retreated a step nearer to Hilsborn, as if seeking refuge with him from this coarse couple.

"Well," began Bertha, "if Fräulein Gretel is at home to young gentlemen, surely her father and mother——"

"Forgive me," said Gretchen gently but with decision, "my

father is just dead, and I lost my mother when I was very young. I pray you respect my grief, and do not mention names that are sacred to me."

"Do just listen to the girl!" exclaimed Bertha. "Instead of thanking God that she still has parents to take care of her, and not feel her a disgrace, she pretends to have no other father than the thief, the ——"

"You must not speak thus in Fräulein Gleissert's presence," cried Hilsborn, indignantly. "Do you not see how you wring her heart?"

"Oh, Sir, I thank you," said Gretchen with dignity. She turned to Bertha. "Whatever your first husband may have been, he was my father in the truest sense of the word, and no one can have a second father; and a mother who has once ceased to be such can never be a mother again. Call me false and heartless if you will,—God, who sees my heart, knows how it can love."

"This is all one gets for kindness," grumbled Bertha. "Here have I been beating my brains half the night to think what I should do for the girl, how I should take care of her, and this is all the thanks I get! Well, it's no wonder, considering who was her father."

"Mammy! mammy! they want you to get out some clean sheets," called a bullet-headed lad at the door.

"Come here, Fritz," cried Bertha. "There, look at your sister." And she drew the boy towards her, evidently expecting that the sight of him would produce an irresistible impression upon Gretchen. "Look, Gretel, this is your brother,—doesn't this touch you? We have three more of them. But that makes no difference, you shall be the fifth; I want some one to take care of the little ones. Only think how delightful it will be for you to find parents and brothers and sisters all at once. They'll take care of you." Suddenly a tear rolled down her fat cheek. "For, after all, you are my child!"

She took Gretchen's face between her hands and gave it a smacking kiss. The girl patiently endured the caress, but, when her mother released her, she stood erect again, like a fair flower upon which dust has been cast without robbing it

of its fragrance or soiling its purity. As the flower differs from the soil whence it springs, so did this child differ from her mother. And as surely as the flower turns from the ground to the sun, the girl's pure spirit turned from her mother to the light that her education had revealed to her.

"Mammy," the boy persisted, plucking Bertha by the skirts, "look sharp!"

"You'll tear my gathers out, you bad boy!" cried his mother, slapping his hand.

The boy screamed. "'Tain't my fault! I was forced to call you. You're so slow when any one is in a hurry."

"Hold your tongue!" his father now interposed. "Leave the room. What will your new sister think of you?"

"I don't care a fig for her," said the boy insolently, as he left the room.

Gretchen and Hilsborn exchanged one long look. It was as though they were old acquaintances and could understand each other without a word. Gretchen shuddered at the thought of living in this family. Moreover, during the night she had formed a resolution that she was determined to carry out, although it should cost her her life.

Her step-father broke the silence. "We shall never get anything settled this way. Where's the good in talking? You must be taken care of, whether you like us or not. You might at least show some gratitude to us for taking trouble about you." He stroked his smooth oily head as he spoke, and his artistic fingers gave a fresh curl to the lock just above his ear. "The case is simply this: My wife thinks it her duty to support you. As you may suppose, it comes rather heavy upon us with our four children, and it stands to reason that you should do something for yourself. We will not ask of you anything unsuitable, for I can see plainly that you are a young lady of education. But, if we are to fulfil the duty of parents towards you, it is only fair that we should claim filial duty from you in return."

He concluded his speech with the bow that he always made in presenting travellers with their little account.

"Oh, is that all?" said Gretchen, greatly relieved. "Then do not give yourselves any anxiety on my account. I renounce all claim to support, and, in the presence of this witness, release you from all parental duties towards me. I ask nothing of you, and shall never ask anything of you, but that you will allow me to depart without hindrance."

The man looked significantly at Bertha, who clasped her hands in amazement. "Do you want to go, then? Why, what will such a child as you do without money or friends?"

Here Hilsborn interposed. "You forget that your deceased husband appointed me his daughter's guardian, and I assure you solemnly, I have never valued my life as I do now that this duty is mine,—a duty that I am determined not to surrender."

Gretchen looked confidently at Hilsborn. "You see, I am not without friends. I will go with this gentleman. There is but one path for me in this world, and that leads me to Ernestine's feet. There is but one duty for me,—to make atonement for my father's sin. I cannot restore to Ernestine what has been taken from her,—that I learned from the papers yesterday. I can offer her nothing but two strong young arms to work for her. The Bible says, 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children;' but I will not wait until they are visited upon me. I will blot them out, as far as I may, and make the curse powerless that rests upon my unhappy father's grave. I will do what he had no time to do here,—make atonement for his crime." She raised her hands to Bertha in entreaty. "Oh, if you are my mother, open your heart to the first and last request of your child, and do not take from me the hope of obtaining pardon for my father by my labour and suffering!"

She fell upon her knees before Bertha, who sobbed aloud.

"Ah, Gretel, my child, you are a dear, good girl. How could I forsake such a true, brave child? I see now how wrong and foolish I was. But I will do better. You shall learn to love me again. Only give up this silly notion of doing penance for your father. Why should you, an innocent creature, suffer for his fault? You are not responsible for his actions."

"I am his flesh and blood—a part of him. His honour is mine. The curse that strikes him strikes me too. Whatever burdened his conscience weighs upon mine. How could I find rest, living or dying, if I did not do all in my power to make good what he undid by wrong? If he took what was not his, ought I to keep it? Is it not my duty to restore it? And, if I cannot do this, should not I try to pay the debt, although I can do so in no other way than by constant labour?"

"But tell me what you want to do? Your cousin has nothing more. What will you both live upon?" asked Bertha.

"I do not yet know. I only know that, thanks to my poor father, I have been taught enough to enable me to support myself, and even another besides. I only know that I will dedicate my whole future life to Ernestine. I long to go to her,—she has suffered most from my father's fault."

The head-waiter drew Bertha aside, and whispered to her, "Let her go: be thankful that we have not a fifth child to support."

"But I love the girl so much!" said Bertha.

"That's all very well; but are we in a condition to take such a charge upon ourselves, to satisfy a whim? And do you suppose that, if we force her to stay, this spoiled princess will be of the least use to us? She would cry from morning until night, instead of working. Let her go wherever she chooses. You have done without her long enough not to make a fuss now because you can't have her with you. I should think four children were enough for you."

"Yes, but—"

"Hush, now, or I will leave the room," her husband whispered, emphatically. "I will not burden myself with Dr. Gleissert's daughter against her will. Let her go with her new champion, and let us hear no more of her!"

"As you choose, then. It is my fault, and I must bear the consequences," said Bertha, for the first time with real sorrow.

"Fräulein Gleissert," the man said, turning to Gretchen,

who had meanwhile been talking in a low tone with Hilsborn, "if you will not make any claim upon us hereafter, we are ready now, hard as it is, to relinquish our rights in favour of this gentleman, who was appointed your guardian by your father."

"I will promise never to do so, Sir," replied Gretchen, with a long sigh of relief. "I am ready to give you all the security I can."

"There is no need of that," replied Herr Meyer, politely, with great satisfaction. "You know that the giving up of our claims depends upon you keeping your promise."

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, then, we will not trouble you further. Probably you would prefer settling the account for this room. It is not much,—you have eaten nothing."

"Come, that is too mean of you," Bertha here interposed. "Is my own child to pay for the shelter of this roof for one night? No; I will not have it. Gretel, do not listen to him,—you shall have something to eat, too, before you go. I am not such an unnatural mother as to turn you out of the house without a bellyful. And now come, Meyer, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Half angrily, half good-naturedly, she drew her dapper husband from the room.

"Oh God, I thank Thee!" cried Gretchen, from the depths of her soul. Suddenly she paused, and reflected with evident embarrassment. Hilsborn took her hand.

"Well, my dear little ward, will you not tell me what is troubling you?"

Gretchen blushed and hesitated. At last she conquered herself, and confided this grief also to her faithful friend.

"It has just occurred to me that I am not sure I have money enough to pay my travelling expenses. I have something with me that I can sell, but I am not sure that it will be enough!"

Hilsborn smiled. "Is that all? Oh, never mind that; I have enough for both."

Gretchen looked mortified. "But I cannot take it from you."

"What, Gretchen, will you not take it from your guardian? Why, this is a guardian's duty. And I will not give it to you; I will only lend it, and you can repay me when you are able."

"You will have to wait a long time: I have so little that I can call my own. It will embarrass me very much to be in your debt."

"Gretchen," said the young man, earnestly, "do not let us speak of such trifles. I transport you to N——, you transport me to heaven. Which owes most to the other—you or I?"

Gretchen could not reply. These new, strange words bewildered her. The sunlight streaming from them penetrated her heart, crushed by the tempest of grief that had swept over it. The blossom opened,—she was no longer a child!

She looked down in confusion. Hilsborn also was embarrassed. Neither could immediately recover from a certain constraint.

"Will you do me a great favour?" the girl asked at last.

"Well?"

"Take me to where my father is lying, and let me bid him farewell once more."

"My dear Fräulein Gleissert, I would do so with all my heart, but it would take us half-an-hour to reach the house where he lies, and the train starts in three-quarters of an hour. If you will remain here another day, I will do what you ask."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Gretchen, in alarm. "I would not for the world trespass any longer upon Herr Meyer's hospitality, or wound my mother's new-found affection any further. It is better to go as quickly as possible. If my poor father still sees and hears me, he must know that I feel the pain of parting from him thus quite as much as if I were allowed to weep beside his lifeless body."

"That is right. Better dwell in thought upon the spirit that was all affection for you, than linger beside the senseless clay that it animated——" He ceased, for Frau Bertha entered with breakfast. She had a black dress over her arm.

"There, Gretel, my dear, is something to eat. I will not let you go till you have taken something. And, if the gentleman will be kind enough to step out one minute, we will try on this dress. You must have some mourning, and where else can you get it, poor child?"

She spread the table hastily, and Hilsborn left the room.

"Now, come here, and let us see how this fits. It is the very dress that I bought ten years ago, when your step-uncle Hartwich died. But it is as good as new. I have worn it very little; and, if you put the skirt on over the pointed waist, it is quite fashionable. Just look! It is not much too large. I was smaller then than I am now, and I have taken it in wherever I could. I was afraid it would be too big for you. Look at that little spot,—that is where you threw your cake into my lap when you were a mite of a child. I hid it in a fold. Dear, dear! I had this very dress on when I left you. I never thought then that you would one day put it on and leave me, as I was leaving you!"

There was something touching in these simple words, and, for the first time, Gretchen threw herself into her mother's arms and burst into tears. "Gretel," said Bertha, crying bitterly, "you must some day feel that you are my child, just as I feel that I am your mother. I hope you will not then repent of leaving me."

"Ah, mother," sobbed Gretchen, "how could you be so cruel to my poor father? How could you so wring my heart when I first saw you again? I might have learned to love you. A child must try to honour its parents. I would never have reproached you for forsaking me; but the abyss into which you plunged my father lies between us, and can never be bridged over."

"But, Gretchen, Gretchen," cried Bertha, "I have done no worse than the young gentleman whom you think so much of. Why do you not blame him?"

"He only did his duty by a friend, and performed it in the kindest way possible. My father saw that, and reposed the greatest confidence in him by trusting me to his care. But you, mother, permitted Herr Meyer to bring the stranger here who came to hand over my father to punish-

ment, and to whom my father was only the enemy of his friend. It was not his duty to spare my father. But, mother, he had once been your husband; he was the father of your child; and yet, when hunted and pursued he sought the shelter of your roof, you had the heart to betray him and deliver him up to death and disgrace. I will not judge you; but ask yourself, mother, did he deserve such treatment at your hands?"

"Ah, well! you may be right; but it really seemed that there was no help for it. I had forgotten everything but the wrong he did me. He has had his punishment, and I must have mine; for, indeed, to love you and lose you is a heavy trial."

Hilsborn knocked at the door. "Frau Meyer, it is almost time to go."

"Yes, yes. Come in," cried Bertha. "Gretchen is dressed."

Hilsborn entered. He regarded compassionately the touching figure in the black dress,—the lovely, childlike face, with large, sad eyes, like those of a wounded fawn. His heart overflowed with pity, and he held out his hand, "Come, we must be upon our way."

"I am ready," Gretchen murmured.

"Stop," cried Bertha. "You must take something first." And she poured out a cup of chocolate, and followed Gretchen about the room as she collected her various trifles for her travelling-bag, until she had persuaded her into taking some of it. "And you must eat some of this cake. You used to be so fond of it, and your lamented—well, yes—your lamented father too. Ah, I used to be well treated when I put that cake on the table! Will you not taste it? Well, then, take some with you." And she crammed as much of it as she could into the girl's travelling-bag.

One minute more, and Gretchen was ready to leave the room. "Good-bye, mother," she said, throwing herself once more into the arms of her mother, whose hot tears fell upon her child's neck. "I will never forget your kindness to me to-day, and if you ever need me, you will find me a daughter to you."

"My child, my good child!" sobbed Bertha. "Try to think as well of me as you can."

"Yes, yes, dear mother. God bless you and yours!"

Hilsborn hurried the girl away. She gently extricated herself from her mother's arms, and, in anguish of soul, descended the stairs that her father had on the previous day ascended for the first and last time.

"Write to me now and then," Bertha called after her.

"Indeed I will, I promise you."

When they reached the hall they found there a crowd of curious idlers, all eager to see the suicide's daughter. Gretchen paused, overcome with dismay. She could hardly trust her limbs to bear her through the throng. A soft, warm hand clasped hers,—it was Hilsborn's. He drew the little hand under his arm, and led her through the gaping loiterers to the carriage. Gretchen was scarcely conscious; she only felt that, supported by this arm, she could raise her head once more, and she was filled with gratitude towards the man who did not shrink from thus espousing the cause of the child of a criminal.

Herr Meyer made them a formal bow as they entered the carriage, and it rolled away past the gay, sparkling waters of the Alster, now swarming with boats.

Gretchen looked out of the carriage window. Yesterday all this had been the world to her,—to-day her world was within, and all without was empty show.

CHAPTER III.

CHURCHYARD FLOWERS.

"COME quick, Johannes, Hilsborn has arrived," whispered Madam Möllner, looking in at the door of an apartment. Johannes was seated by Ernestine's bedside, her head leaning upon his hand, while the poor girl moved restlessly from side to side, muttering unintelligible words. He motioned to Willmers to take his place, and went softly out.

"Thank God, you are back again. Have you brought him with you?"

"He has escaped."

"Hilsborn, that is terrible!"

"He is gone whither he cannot be pursued, and whence he can work no more mischief."

"Is he dead?"

"He is dead, and he died in fearful agony."

"God have mercy on his soul! Did he take poison?" asked the old lady.

"Yes; just after his arrest. I arranged matters as well as I could, but he had only a little over two thousand gulden in his possession. He had put all the property in the Unkenheim factory."

"And that is bankrupt; so we shall not be able to save anything for Ernestine," said Johannes.

"I am very sorry for that."

"But Hilsborn, dear friend," said Johannes, warmly, "I am quite forgetting to thank you. How shall I repay you for taking this journey for me?"

"I am paid already."

"Indeed! What possible pleasure could such a mission afford?" inquired Madam Möllner.

Hilsborn smiled. "Such pleasure as I never dreamed of. Gleissert bequeathed me a treasure the possession of which no one, God willing, shall dispute with me. May I show it you? I should like to entrust it to your keeping, dear friends, for awhile."

Johannes and his mother exchanged looks of surprise. Was Hilsborn quite right in his mind?

"I will tell you nothing more," he said. "See for yourselves." He left the room, and appeared again in a few moments with Gretchen upon his arm. The poor child ventured only one timid, beseeching look at the strangers, but the touching expression of her eyes won their hearts immediately.

"Good God! his child?" asked Madam Möllner.

"His child," Hilsborn replied, with grave emphasis.

The old lady went up instantly to the shrinking girl and embraced her, saying significantly to Hilsborn, "Now I understand you!"

"Dear Fräulein Gleissert," said Johannes, "you are most welcome, and you must allow us to offer you a home until you find a better."

"You are too kind," stammered Gretchen. "I know how bold I am, but my guardian—"

"What! Hilsborn, are you her guardian?"

"Her dying father wished it to be so, and therefore I brought her here to place her under your protection, although she wished to see no one except Ernestine."

"She can hardly see her for some time yet," said Möllner. "Ernestine's fever may be infectious."

"Oh, is that all?" Gretchen ventured to remonstrate. "Then pray let me go to her. Nothing can harm me when I am doing my duty. Better die than live without being permitted to do what I know I ought. Dear Herr Hilsborn, you know what I mean: speak for me!"

"Do not refuse her, Johannes. She will not be content until she is with Ernestine. I make a fearful sacrifice in exposing her to this danger, when I would guard her as the apple of my eye, but I know how she is longing for Ernestine."

"Then, Fräulein Gleissert, you shall share with my mother the care of the invalid."

"Thank you all a thousand times! May I go at once?"

"Take her to Ernestine's room, mother dear, while I speak with Hilsborn," said Johannes.

"Come, then, my child." The old lady opened the door of the darkened apartment, and the girl entered.

Gretchen stood as if rooted to the spot. There lay the dreaded, mute accuser of her father, the unfortunate victim of his crimes, pale and beautiful as an ideal embodiment of death—a glorious lily, prostrated, perhaps never again to stand erect, by the same hand that a few days before had been laid in blessing upon Gretchen's head. The poor child, crushed by the sight, sank upon her knees, and extending her arms, cried in a suppressed voice of agony, "Forgive, forgive!"

Ernestine did not reply, for she did not hear. Reason was dethroned behind that pale, broad brow, and confused dreams were running riot there in their wildest anarchy.

Only when Gretchen perceived that Ernestine was wholly unconscious, did she dare to approach close to her. Gazing at her with admiring pity, she murmured to herself, "No, my father did not understand, or he maligned you. You are not bad, you cannot be bad!" And, kneeling, she breathed a gentle kiss upon the small hand.

Did the invalid feel that love had drawn nigh? She put out her hand towards the kneeling girl, and, detaining her by the dress, leaned her head upon her shoulder.

"She will let me stay by her," whispered Gretchen, with a beaming face.

Madam Möllner could not help stroking the brow of the girl, and Willmers felt as if this stranger were an angel, come to lead Ernestine into a better world.

"I like to see such a sick room," said a suppressed bass voice, that made Gretchen start. "This is a pretty sight," it continued, and old Heim looked searchingly at Gretchen from beneath his bushy white eyebrows.

The girl would have risen, but Ernestine would not re-

lease her, and Heim motioned her to be quiet. "You have one hand free, my child, give it to me. I am your guardian's foster-father, and I know what a good child you are. The fellow was right to bring you here,—I would have brought you myself. God bless you!"

He seated himself by the bedside, and a deep expectant silence reigned in the room as he felt Ernestine's pulse. Besides Gretchen's, two other anxious eyes were riveted upon his face. Möllner had just entered noiselessly. "Well, what do you think?" he asked eagerly.

Heim shrugged his shoulders. "I do not think it is typhus. Nevertheless——"

Scarcely had the invalid heard Johannes' voice when she released Gretchen and turned her face towards the spot where Möllner was standing. He approached the bed and leaned over her. She put out her arms to him, but instantly dropped them again, as if, even in her delirium, she would not confess herself conquered. And then she rambled away wildly, declaring that she could not get rid of the skull,—that it would follow her everywhere, and then pleaded piteously that she was not yet dead, and begged that they would not lower her into the narrow grave.

"This is the result of a woman's giving herself up to anatomical studies," said Möllner.

"There has been dreadful work with the nerves here, and with the brain, too," muttered Heim. "The fever has increased since I have been sitting here. I wish we could disabuse her mind of these delirious fancies!"

"I have tried that, but contradiction only excites her."

"Let this young lady try, then. It is impossible to say what effect she may produce," said Heim. "Have you the courage, my child, to watch with your cousin to-night?"

"Oh, Sir, I will not go to bed until Ernestine has left hers."

"There's a brave girl! upon my word, I've seen nothing equal to this for a long while. She will soon rival Ernestine in my heart!"

Johannes laid a cloth dipped in ice-water upon the fore-

head of Ernestine, who continued moaning that she was not dead, and they must not treat her thus.

"Ernestine," said Gretchen, in her clear, bell-like voice, "no one shall harm you. Be quiet, dear."

"Do you not see," wailed the sick girl, "they are trying to weigh my brain? and it hurts! it hurts!"

"Ernestine, you are dreaming," said Gretchen. "This is only a damp cloth. Feel it yourself."

"Remember that, although I am dead, my soul is living. Oh, if I could only stop thinking! To die is nothing! but to live on after death is horrible!"

Johannes turned away, and wrung his hands. "Ah, Johannes!" she exclaimed, "my uncle's knife is sharp; I cannot get away. Why did they bind me here, if they thought me dead?" And in an instant she thrust Gretchen aside, and would have leaped from the bed, had not Johannes gently but firmly thrown his strong arm around her, and forced her back among the pillows.

"Let me go! let go!" she moaned. "Who ever heard of vivisection of human subjects? I will not be dissected before I am dead!"

"Ernestine," Johannes cried in despair, "it is I,—Johannes. No one shall harm you!"

But she either did not hear, or did not understand him, and she struggled so that Johannes could scarcely hold her.

"This is dreadful!" said Madam Möllner, supporting Gretchen's tottering form. "Do you still think, Heim, after this, that physiology is the study for a woman's nerves? Can a woman's nature take a more terrible revenge than this?"

Heim shook his head, and grumbled, "Frail stuff, indeed, but yet I thought she could stand it. Well, well, one is never too old to learn."

Still Ernestine raved on, ceaselessly haunted by the grim phantoms called up by the fearful struggle she had recently passed through.

At last exhaustion supervened, and she lay perfectly silent and motionless. Heim took his hat and cane. "I think

she will have a quieter night. You must take some rest, Johannes. You cannot stand such uninterrupted watching."

"I have done all that I could to persuade him to lie down," said his mother. "I can easily watch one night, especially now since I have such a dear little assistant. And Willmers, too, will wear herself out. She is as obstinate as Johannes."

"There is nothing to be done with him," said Heim. "It is lucky that we are in vacation time, or this would soon come to an end. Well, I must go. It is a good drive to town."

"It would have been better if we could have taken her home with us," said the old lady. "But the illness was so sudden and violent that she could not be moved, and we had to come out here to nurse her."

"You are good people!" Heim held out his hand to them. "God will reward you for your kindness to the poor child."

"All that I do, dear friend, is done for my son's sake. I am sure he will thank me."

"Indeed he will, mother," declared Johannes with emphasis.

When Heim entered the next room, he found Hilsborn there, standing at the window, lost in reverie.

"Well, my boy, will you have a seat in my carriage?"

"Why, father, I should like to stay here to-day and assist Möllner," said Hilsborn, slightly confused.

"Assist Möllner? Humph!" Heim paused, and riveted his piercing eyes with infinite humour upon Hilsborn's blushing face. "Well, well, my boy, since you wish it, pray assist Möllner. You have my free consent to do so."

The young man clasped his foster-father's hand with an emotion of gratitude that he hardly understood himself.

"Humph!" said Heim again. "We understand! we understand! All right! Nothing happens but the unexpected. There's no need to be ashamed of your choice. Good-night, and"—a good-humoured smile played about his mouth—"pray assist Möllner diligently. Do you hear?"

The genial old man went chuckling out of the room.

Hilsborn bethought himself awhile, then looked cautiously into the sick-room and beckoned to Gretchen. She instantly came to him.

"Only a moment," he begged, and gently drew her away with him. "You must have a little fresh air. The others think only of Ernestine. I am here to take care of you, and to see that you do not overtask your strength. Come, take a few turns with me in the garden."

"As you please," said the girl, meekly.

"Not as I please, Gretchen. You must not talk in that way. I do not like it." He threw a shawl over her shoulders, and gave her his arm. Together they went down into the garden.

"This garden," said Gretchen, "reminds me of ours at school."

"Were you happy there?" asked her companion.

"Oh, very! I had so many kind teachers and companions!"

"It must be hard for you to leave such a home."

"My home now is with Ernestine. I am content only by her bedside. I wish for nothing else. I do not choose to wish for anything else."

Hilsborn broke off a fading acacia-sprig from the tree.

"Give it to me," said Gretchen. "Let me try whether Ernestine will recover or not." And she pulled off the leaves one after another. "Yes,—no,—yes,—no. Yes, she will get well!"

"Do you know 'Faust'?"

"No. We were never allowed to read Goethe."

"Your namesake in 'Faust' plucks off the leaves of a daisy, to answer a question that she puts it; but the question is a different one."

"What is it?"

"She asks whether she is beloved."

Gretchen looked down.

"Did you never put that question?"

"How could I? I was sure that my father, my teachers, and friends loved me, and I knew no one else."

"And yet you must often have consulted your flower oracle?"

"Oh, yes. There was plenty to ask,—what place I should take in the examination,—whether I was to have a letter from my father that day,—and ever so many things besides. But that is all over now. There are few flowers or questions for me now."

"You must not indulge such gloomy, autumnal fancies. The flowers will bloom again, and with them many a youthful hope in your heart. Perhaps some day or other you will want to know whether one whom you love loves you."

Gretchen looked seriously at him from out her brown eyes.

"If Ernestine loves me, and——"

"Well, and——?"

"And you, I ask nothing more."

"Gretchen, do you not believe that I love you?"

"Yes; I think you do," the girl replied, frankly.

"By the good God who sees all hearts, I think so too," cried Hilsborn, pressing the little hand that lay upon his arm more closely to his heart.

They stood still for one moment together in the gathering twilight, and then walked slowly on. It was an unusually mild autumn evening. The crescent of the new moon glimmered, like a diamond upon dark locks, just above the tall firs that crowned the hill that had been Ernestine's favourite resort. As Gretchen looked up, her eyes were moist.

"The moon is the sun of the sorrowful," she said suddenly. "Hers is the only light that weeping eyes can endure. They close in the garish rays of the sun, but they look up to her through tears. When she reigns in the sky, repose comes to the weary after the day's dull pain. And you, my kind guardian, seem to me like the moon,—you are so calm and still. I shrink from others with a feeling as if they must despise me; but with you I can weep freely, and rest from all my pain."

"I thank you, Gretchen, for these words," said Hilsborn.

Then the girl, in the self-abandonment of her grief, leaned her head upon Hilsborn's shoulder and wept silently.

Thus they walked slowly on for a time, without speaking. The moon declined behind the firs, but gleamed through them when the night-breeze stirred their boughs. A low whisper,—a soft suggestion of resurrection,—trembled among the withered leaves and leafless branches. The little silver skiff glided quietly down the horizon; misty vapours floated about the youthful pair like a bridal veil. Their innocent hearts mourned over scarcely-closed graves in the midst of nature, enlivened by no young blossoms, no nightingale's song, and yet a future spring was gently stirring around and within them, amid tears and autumn desolation.

"We must return," said Gretchen, suddenly rousing herself from her sad thoughts, "They will miss us." And she hastened on in advance of her friend. At the door of the sick-room he detained her for one moment. "Gretchen, you have done more than I can tell for me in the last half-hour, but yet not enough. You will give me just such another walk and talk every evening, will you not?"

"With all my heart!"

"And, Gretchen, I shall pass this night watching here in this room. Come to the door now and then, and give me one look."

"Why?" she asked, with a blush.

"Because your face is the dearest sight in the world to me."

"Oh, I am glad of that!" she faltered.

"Remember sometimes to give me a smile,—will you not? I shall wait for it from minute to minute and from hour to hour."

"You shall not wait in vain. How could I refuse to gratify a wish of yours?"

And with these words, that were more to the young man than she herself dreamed of, she left him, and entered the sick-room with her heart filled with mingled joy and pain.

Johannes was kneeling by the bed, his forehead leaning upon Ernestine's arm, that was hanging down outside the

coverlet. His mother gave Gretchen a kindly nod. No one ventured to speak. Ernestine seemed asleep.

Gretchen sat down beside the old lady and gratefully pressed her offered hand.

Thus they sat for an hour, motionless, and then Ernestine had a fresh access of delirium. Her whole illness seemed to be a desperate effort of nature to expel the evil, unnatural ideas nestling in her brain like destructive parasites. At last Johannes induced his mother and Willmers to take a little rest, while he and Gretchen watched. He suffered so much at the sight of Ernestine's sufferings, that it was a relief to him to know that his mother was not in the room,—his mother, in whose presence his affection forced him to exercise such difficult self-control.

Gretchen was a faithful assistant, although the poor child's heart was well-nigh broken at the constant reference to her father that filled Ernestine's ravings. Fragments of the past were brought to light, detached scenes rehearsed incoherently, but running through all, the unfortunate daughter could perceive the dark crimson thread of her father's guilt.

The tears coursed down her cheeks. Johannes never noticed them. He had eyes and ears only for Ernestine. The orphaned child felt alone, indeed. But no! How could she entertain such a thought? Had she not a friend and protector near? And had she not promised to bestow a kindly glance now and then upon the faithful sentinel? How could she forget him for one moment? While Johannes stood by Ernestine, she softly opened the door and looked out. There he sat, his eyes full of expectation, and a bright smile broke over his face at the sight of Gretchen. He started up and tore a leaf, upon which he had been writing, out of his note-book.

"Gretchen," he whispered, "here is something for you. Take it, as it is kindly meant. You are having a trying night. I can imagine all that you are suffering. Do not forget that there is one sitting here thinking of and for you."

Gretchen held out her hand, and he put the paper into it.

"I thank you, even before I know what it contains," she whispered in reply. "It must be something kind, since it comes from you." As she re-entered the sick-room, and seated herself by the table upon which the night-lamp stood, she shivered, for Ernestine's words were full of horror. But she held a talisman in her hand, and Hilsborn's handwriting banished all haunting sorrow. She unfolded the paper and read:—

"Weep, poor heart, and yet again
 Breathe those gentle songs of sadness,
 Not for thee are notes of gladness,
 Softly fall thy tears like rain.
 Look to heaven when woes thus move thee,
 From the eternal stars above thee
 Comfort seek in earthly pain.

"Weep, poor heart, when all in vain
 Thou hast hoped for rest from sadness,
 When the stars rain down no gladness.
 Yet despair not ! once again
 Lift thine eyes when sorrow moves thee,
 In the eyes of one who loves thee,
 Comfort seek in earthly pain."

Gretchen sat with hands folded, looking at these words, that opened a new heaven above her and revealed a new earth around her. Large as her young heart was, it seemed all too narrow for the flood of tenderness that filled it now. She arose once more, and glided from the room. To Johannes, who gazed after her absently, it seemed as if her airy figure diffused a light around it.

In the next room she approached Hilsborn, silently, her eyes suffused with tears, and held out her hand. He looked up at her with entreaty, saw how she was agitated, and that her heart was beating almost to suffocation. He drew her nearer and nearer to him, until, like ripened wheat awaiting the reaper's scythe, she sank into his arms, and burst into tears. But her tears were like the glittering drops that the breeze shakes from the trees after a summer rain.

"In the eyes of one who loves thee,
 Comfort seek in earthly pain"

echoed in the hearts of the lovers.

Then Ernestine's voice came ringing through the open door. "What is the end? Eternal night, eternal silence, and eternal solitude!"

"Oh, no, no ! eternal bliss!" breathed Gretchen softly to herself.

CHAPTER IV.

MORNING AGAIN.

A CALL from Möllner to Gretchen separated the young people before they found words to express what they felt. Ernestine grew so much worse in the course of the night that Gretchen did not leave her again. When at last the rays of the rising sun shone through the heavy curtains of the room, the mother of Johannes released the poor child from her painful watch, and she was free to hasten to her lover. He drew her with him to Ernestine's study. Everything was just as it had been left on the day when Ernestine was taken ill,—nothing had been touched. The ashes of the burnt fairy-book were still lying on the hearth, the Æolian harp breathed forth sad melody to the rude autumn wind, the roses were fallen, and only the thorn-covered bushes remained. The chests were still standing about, packed for the voyage—speaking plainly of what had been the plans of the proud spirit now so prostrated by disease. A forgotten pen lay upon the desk, and dust was everywhere. No one had thought of arranging this room,—care for Ernestine had given abundant occupation to the entire household. The pause in the life of the invalid was mirrored in this apartment, where everything seemed awaiting the moment when a busy hand would sweep, dust, and put all in order, and the glad news be heard—"Ernestine is better!" But this moment was still in the future. Hither the young couple came, ignorant of the struggles these walls had witnessed, the pain and anguish that had been suffered here.

"The days of our age are threescore years and ten; and

though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years, yet is their strength then but labour and sorrow." These words, carved on the table, were the first visible sign to these youthful hearts of the struggles, sufferings, and sacrifices of the woman by whose feverish bed they had found each other. And Gretchen stayed her steps by the table, and read the words thoughtfully. "She is right," she said to herself. "And if she chose to impose upon herself this severe law, can I choose any other motto—I? What right have I to desire any other delight in life but labour, and sorrow, and penance? Ah, Ernestine, now first I see how noble you are, and what wrong my father did you."

"Gretchen," asked Hilsborn, "what are you thinking about?"

"It seems to me as if an invisible hand here wrote something for my eyes alone. How could I for one moment resign myself to the thought of a happiness that could turn me aside from my first and most sacred duty?"

"Gretchen, how am I to understand you?"

She clasped her hands, and, with eyes fixed reverentially upon the carved motto, said, "All my hopes and dreams must be sacrificed for her whose motto this is. Until she is happy, how can I wish to be so?"

"I see what you have resolved, my dearest. You intend to obtain forgiveness for your father, to blot out his sin by your devotion. But you think only of her against whom your father sinned most heavily? There is another to whom you owe some reparation on his account, and that is myself!"

"What?"

He drew her towards him, and went on with all a lover's sophistry. "Yes, dearest, your father wronged mine. He robbed him of a valuable scientific discovery."

"Heaven help me! is this so?" cried the girl, greatly distressed.

"And do you not see that it will be no infringement of the duty that you impose upon yourself, if you grant me the reparation that I ask of you, even although I should

ask for nothing less than yourself—your entire life, Gretchen,—would you think me too bold?—would you think the compensation for what your father deprived me of too great?"

"Oh, no, no! much too small," whispered Gretchen, with glistening eyes.

"Not too small. I know it is too great. But love, Gretchen, will not weigh deserts. Everything is in your hands, dearest. Your father injured my father, but he gives me his child."

The girl put her hands to her throbbing brow. "Can this be so?—can so great a blessing spring from a curse? I do not deserve such joy. Can it be no wrong, but a duty, to love you, whom I would have renounced for duty's sake? I longed to labour and suffer for my father's crime, and is this my penance—to give myself to him whom I love? It is too much,—I cannot believe it. But what shall I do? How shall I reconcile my duty to Ernestine and to you? Help me, advise me, that I may not neglect one duty for the sake of the other,—there can be no true happiness without a clear conscience. Help me, then, to be really happy."

"My darling," said Hilsborn, "I understand you now, just as I have always understood you, and I will help you to satisfy your conscience. If I could, I would shower every precious gift upon you, how then can I deprive you of that priceless possession—peace of mind? True love brings true peace in its train, and this peace shall be yours. Therefore do for Ernestine all that your heart dictates, as long as you can be of service to her. I shall be near you, and we can at least exchange a word now and then. True love is easily content,—it prizes even the smallest token. I will not claim one moment that you think belongs to Ernestine,—that would trouble you. We will tell no one as yet of our betrothal but my faithful foster-father, Heim, without whose blessing I can take no step in life. The knowledge of our happiness might grate upon poor Möllner, who has so much to endure. But, Gretchen, when Ernestine has entirely recovered, it will be ours to enjoy our bliss without a pang. And if—but that I can scarcely believe,—she should still

refuse to share Möllner's lot, then, I swear to you, I will aid you truly in all that you do for her. She shall live with us and be to me as a sister. Is not this all that you desire, my dearest one?"

"Yes, you read my very soul, for I could never consent to be your—wife, until I knew that Ernestine was well and content. But I have hardly thought myself grown up—I am hardly fit to be a wife. How can I accustom myself to the thought?"

"I will do all I can to teach you, dear little wife. The lesson will not be hard to learn," said Hilsborn, gaily.

"Perhaps not," Gretchen replied, and for the first time there was an arch sparkle in the melancholy brown eyes.

Thus these two hearts were united, speedily, in childlike faith, after the manner of youth, and without a struggle. But above, in the sick room, two hearts were wrestling in mortal pain. With poor Ernestine, love must reach the light only through the night of error and illusion,—that light in which Gretchen and Hilsborn innocently basked, driven from their Eden by no angel with the flaming sword. Such strong natures as Möllner's and Ernestine's could not unite without a struggle. Each had framed a world for itself, and one of these must be shattered, before they could unite to live in one world. The farther apart they were, the more powerful the attraction between them—the more certainly would the weaker crumble to pieces in contact with the stronger. It is the mysterious condition under which gifted natures receive their talents from God, that they must strive and labour for a happiness that often falls unsought into the lap of weaker natures. Thus Eternal Wisdom maintains the balance of its gifts,—the weak and the simple receive without asking what the strong must earn. And these two gifted creatures were earning hardly their portion of life's joy, that they might fulfil the law prescribed by God for creatures so constituted. His laws are inscribed not upon the heavens, but in the human heart, and all our striving for perfection is, in fact, only an endeavour to read these laws correctly. And how often do we read them falsely, in spite of all our honest pains!

How truly was this the case with Ernestine, who had never been taught to regard the still small voice in her heart as the voice of God! All her errors and sufferings were the result, as are those of most men, of a misconception of the Divine will. If she had known that she was destined to purchase happiness by self-sacrifice, she would have paid for it voluntarily, and would not have wrestled with her destiny to the last, until she almost succumbed in the conflict. Her life had been well nigh ruined by the want of true Christian culture; she was ready to make every sacrifice, except that which alone is well pleasing in God's sight—the sacrifice of self-will.

And Johannes, true and without guile as he was, endured a terrible trial in Ernestine's sufferings. From hour to hour he became more thoroughly convinced that he had been the means of prostrating Ernestine upon a sick bed,—that he had burdened her beyond her strength by his reckless description of the danger that threatened her,—and he was a prey to remorse. He reproached himself bitterly, and tormented himself with devising a thousand ways in which he could have managed matters more wisely. "It is presumptuous to attempt to play the part of Providence, for the best intentions are no warrant for the consequences," said he to his mother, whilst Gretchen and Hilsborn were weaving their rosy future.

"Results are always in God's hand," replied Frau Möllner.

"Amen!" said Johannes solemnly, from the depths of his tortured heart.

Thus the pilot, seeing looming before him the dangerous rock, past which his skill has not availed to guide the vessel intrusted to his care, says, "I have done what I could, now Providence takes the helm." And in this instance also Providence was guiding the vessel, but slowly, so slowly, that the lookers-on were agonized.

Day after day, and week after week passed, without any visible improvement. Ernestine's consciousness did not return. Heim shook his head. He said to Johannes one morning, "I wish your brother-in-law were at home,

Johannes. I should very much like to hear his opinion of the case."

He made no other reply to Johannes' inquiries.

Maurice Kern and his wife had been spending the vacation in a pleasure-trip, and were shortly to return home.

It looked as if Heim were coming to a conclusion, and did not wish to pronounce an opinion without consulting a third authority.

Johannes was consumed by anxiety. For four weeks he never left Ernestine's bedside, only sleeping when she was quiet, and then with his weary head supported against the back of his chair. He would have no help, except from his mother and Gretchen. Even Willmers was not allowed to do all that she wished to do. Only one stranger was now and then admitted to the sick-room,—a venerable, aged form, that sat there motionless, disturbing no one. It was old Leonhardt. Every third day his son conducted him to the castle, and no one had the heart to refuse to allow him to take his place at the foot of Ernestine's bed, where he listened to her gloomy ravings and Möllner's deep-drawn sighs, and only now and then sadly shook his gray head.

One day he said, "If she would only come to herself sufficiently to allow us to relieve her mind of this anxiety about dying, that seems to lurk at the root of her delirium, then I should have hopes of her speedy recovery."

"True, Father Leonhardt, true," replied Johannes. "But she has not one lucid interval. It drives me to despair."

"Courage, courage, dear friend," said Leonhardt, "and, remember, you only did your duty. That thought must comfort you."

"I am afraid it will not comfort me long," was Johannes gloomy reply.

While they were speaking, Heim's carriage drove up. This time he was not alone,—Maurice was with him. Leonhardt retired to the library, where Walter awaited him, and Heim and Maurice entered the ante-chamber. Gretchen and Hilsborn were standing whispering together by the window. The former hastily left the room, embarrassed by the entrance of the stranger with Heim.

"Who the deuce is your pretty companion?" asked Maurice, in surprise.

"She is my ward, Gleissert's unfortunate daughter," Hilsborn explained with some reserve. "I brought her hither from Hamburg."

"Oh, I know, I know,—heard all about it. Guardian, then, are you? Very delightful position, with such a charming ward," laughed Maurice. "Here's a fellow! looks as if he couldn't say 'boh' to a goose, and brings home such a pretty girl the first journey he takes! Yes, yes,—'still waters!'"

"Do not jest," Hilsborn begged. "It is too serious a matter for jesting."

"Nay, never mind what I say," said Maurice. "I must pay some respect to your new dignity. Hardly out of leading-strings yourself, and appointed guardian to young unprotected females! Ha! ha!"

"Be quiet, Johannes will hear you," grumbled Heim. "Reserve your jests for more congenial society."

"But, my good friend, you cannot expect me to mope for that fool of a woman, whom I have always wished at the devil. Who could see, with patience, Johannes wasting his best powers upon such an ungrateful creature? If we were compelled to stand by and look on while a gardener spent time and trouble trying to make a common brier produce tea-roses, should we not long to root out the worthless weed?"

"Your comparison does not hold good, my friend. The Hartwich damsel has her thorns, but with care and patience she may be made to blossom into a beautiful flower."

"Are you never coming in?" asked Johannes, opening the door of the sick-room, and looking out impatiently. "What keeps you so long?"

"Yes, we are coming," said Heim; "but, Johannes, I would rather see Ernestine alone with Maurice."

"As you please, but pray make haste," said Johannes, coming fully into the room. "Good-day, Maurice. How are you? Did you not bring Angelica with you?"

"She wanted to come with me, but I would not let her."

"And why not?" asked Johannes, in a tone of disappointment.

"Because women are always in the way at such times."

"But had you any right to refuse to allow your wife to see her mother and brother after a separation of four weeks?"

"I have the right, as her husband, to allow and forbid what I choose. If you wished it otherwise, you should have had it so said in the marriage contract," Maurice replied sharply. "Angelica never wishes for anything that I do not choose she should have, and whoever does not train his wife in the same way is a fool, my dear brother-in-law. Come, don't be vexed—you know what a prickly fellow I am."

"I am not in the mood to mind your insinuations," said Johannes wearily. "You war with an unarmed foe. Go in, and bring me some good news if you can."

Maurice repented his hasty words when he saw how troubled Johannes really was, and immediately entered the sick-room with Heim.

Johannes sank into the chair by the window and leaned his heavy head against the panes. Terrible thoughts and fears had lately assailed him! He tried not to heed them. But if the two physicians should share them also? His heart beat louder and louder with every moment's delay. He could hardly breathe. Hilsborn stood beside him, and, without speaking, pressed his hand. They heard Maurice speak to Ernestine, and her wild, confused replies. Then the murmur of Heim's and Maurice's voices was alone audible.

At last the door opened. Even Maurice looked very grave.

"Well?" asked Johannes.

"Yes," said Maurice with a shrug, "I agree with Heim, the fever is a secondary consideration now. It is subdued—there is something worse than death to be dreaded."

"Ah! I feared it!" Johannes said with a low suppressed cry. "Say it out,—I am upon the rack—you fear—good God! you fear for her mind?"

He could say no more.

Maurice and Heim exchanged glances. "Be calm, Johannes. Remember, this is only conjecture. We are mortal, and cannot be certain. Only it cannot be denied that her malady looks now more like an affection of the brain than anything else."

"It is a well-known fact," Heim continued, "that patients affected in this manner are often slightly deranged in mind for some time after the fever is subdued, but such cases are most frequent among the aged, and the derangement is not of as long duration as with Ernestine. Her continual harping upon the same idea troubled me from the beginning,—it was like monomania,—always her death and a terrible eternity ensuing upon it. She must have pondered upon it far too much lately,—it has grown to be a fixed idea. If there are not shortly signs of returning reason, I am afraid she will be——"

"Insane!" Johannes completed the sentence—"insane!" He buried his face in his hands, in an agony that convulsed his whole frame.

Maurice laid his hand upon his shoulder. "Johannes," he said, "be strong. For years we have looked to you, in joy and sorrow, as the very ideal of manly self-control and firm determination. Your example has shown us the true dignity of manhood,—and shall pain upon a woman's account have power to move you thus? No, indeed! she is not worth it. Ten of these fools are not worth one throb of agony in such a man!"

"Do not speak to me. Leave me, I pray you, to myself," cried Johannes.

"We had better go," said Heim. "He will soon come to himself."

"Good-by, Johannes," Maurice said, pressing his hand. "And listen—open the shutters in Ernestine's room. Speak to her, call to her. It is not good for her to be in that gloomy twilight. It is a case where you must try to awaken reason—not let it smoulder away with too much care and nursing. Some convalescents would never leave their beds if they were not driven from them, because they are too

weak to exert themselves. And it is just so with a diseased brain. The mind must be helped upon its feet, especially with women, who are only too ready to let themselves go."

"Maurice is right," said Heim. "I agree with him. To-day is the ninth since the fever left her. We may risk something. Farewell, Johannes. I will come again this evening."

The gentlemen motioned to Hilsborn to accompany them, and left the room.

Johannes clasped his hands, and there burst from his heart such a prayer as comes from the soul only in moments of deepest anguish. "Oh God, who knowest my heart, its thoughts and desires, canst Thou enter into judgment with me so heavily? Must I be the ruin of her whom I would have saved? Shall I be the cause of worse than death to her whom I would have rescued from death? Can I bear this and still retain my own reason? Have I destroyed the treasure, the hope of my existence? Have I shattered the glorious image to whose perfection I would have lent an aiding hand? And yet I meant to fulfil my duty. Oh God, if I have erred, mine be the punishment, mine,—not hers through me. No burden can be laid upon me that I will not gladly bear, save this alone!"

He entered the sick-room, and stood looking at Ernestine, who was lying as if half-asleep, muttering disconnected, unintelligible words. Should he arouse her from this apparent repose. No; he had not the heart to do it. He drew aside the curtain, and the broad light of day fell full upon the ghost-like face. She moved, as if the light pained her, and turned aside. Willmers, who sat by the bed-side knitting, motioned him away. Johannes let the curtain fall again.

Suddenly the door was flung open, and Gretchen rushed in, her chest heaving, her eyes full of horror and despair. Hilsborn followed, attempting in vain to restrain her.

"Do not keep me!" the girl wailed out. "There is no comfort, no hope for me in this world! It is my father's work—and I have sworn to repair the injury done by him. How can I repair this wrong? How recall the glorious mind that he has destroyed?" And, almost frantic, she

threw herself upon the bed beside Ernestine, and, seizing her hands, "Ernestine, wake up!—you must not lose your reason! Ernestine, listen—hear—Ernestine, Ernestine!" she cried, in the tone in which she had bidden her father farewell.

Ernestine trembled at the call. She started up, and stared with a wild expression at the strange figure clad in black. She closed her eyes, then opened them again, only to close them again once more, as if she had not had sufficient sleep. Then she asked, "Who is this?"

Johannes and Hilsborn stood in breathless expectation. They pressed each other's hands, with a look that said more than any words could have done, and Johannes made a sign to Willmers.

"It is your young nurse, Fräulein Ernestine," Willmers replied.

"Oh, indeed!" said Ernestine, slowly. Again she closed her eyes, but remained sitting upright. Hilsborn went to the window, and admitted a little more light.

Then she rubbed her eyes, and looked around. Gretchen had sunk upon her knees, and did not venture to stir. Johannes stood concealed by the head of the bed.

"What o'clock is it?" asked Ernestine.

"Half-past eleven," said Willmers.

Again there was silence for awhile. Hilsborn drew the curtains still more aside. Just then Frau Möllner in the other room, ignorant of what was going on, approached the half-open door. Fortunately, Johannes saw her, and motioned her away. She withdrew instantly; but the door creaked a little.

"Who was coming in?" asked Ernestine.

"The maid," Willmers replied, with ready presence of mind.

Then there was a long pause, during which the throbbing of the three hearts, agitated by alternate fear and hope, was almost audible.

"Willmers," said Ernestine.

"Fräulein?"

"Have I been dreaming—or did I really burn the book?"

"What book, dear Fräulein Ernestine?"

"The fairy-book,—the old fairy-book. Ah, I burned it. How sorry I am."

"Another can easily be procured. Do not fret about that, dear," said Willmers, suddenly remembering that there had been a fire in Ernestine's library on the day when she was taken ill.

"Oh, no; it will not be the same,—not the same," said Ernestine, sadly, and was silent again for some time.

"Willmers!"

"Fräulein?"

"I thought I was wakened by a terrible shriek. I was so frightened, I trembled all over. See how vivid our dreams can be!"

"No one shrieked," said Willmers.

"Where is my uncle?"

"Gone to America."

"Gone!—and left me here?"

"You were ill."

"How long have I been in bed, then?"

"Oh, a couple of weeks."

"Ah! Who has been attending me?"

"Doctor Heim and Professor Möllner."

"Indeed!—Möllner!"

She was silent, and then passed into a quiet half-slumber; but she smiled in her sleep.

Hilsborn and Johannes went out of the room on tiptoe. Without, they clasped each other's hands in mutual congratulations.

"What do you think now?" asked Johannes.

"I think she is safe," said Hilsborn.

Gretchen slipped out and joined them. "Oh, you should see her lying there now, so calm and quiet—she does not even murmur in her sleep as she did."

"Gretchen," said Johannes, "it is your doing. God bless you for it!"

Gretchen looked up at Hilsborn, who could not resist the temptation to put his arm around her and draw her towards him. Johannes smiled, for the first time for weeks, and

said, "I saw it coming. Would that such happiness were mine!"

"But," said Gretchen, timidly, "remember, it is a great deal harder to win such a creature as Ernestine than such a poor little thing as I am. And only think what she will be when won."

Madam Möllner interrupted the conversation. She saw with delight the hope in her son's eyes, and thanked God.

They sat together in the antechamber for half-an-hour until they heard Ernestine waken.

Johannes then beckoned to Willmers, and said to her "Prepare Ernestine as cautiously as you can for seeing us."

"Willmers!" called Ernestine.

"Here I am, Fräulein Ernestine."

"I feel so well now,—so rested! I must have been very ill; for my head is still confused, and it is hard to think. Tell me, my dear Willmers, am I not very poor?"

"No one is very poor, Fräulein, who is as rich in mind and heart as you are."

"Do not evade my question. I begin to remember it exactly. My uncle deceived me. And Möllner,—yes, that was the evening when he told me I must die—and the skull fell down and struck my poor head just here,"—and she put up her hand to the scar that had remained since her childhood from her terrible fall,—“just here. It was very painful, but I hardly felt it, in my hurry to read all that there was in the book about diseases of the heart. And then those terrible thoughts of eternal night and eternal silence—and then—then—I remember nothing more. Oh, Willmers, pray draw aside the curtains, and let me enjoy the light as long as I may."

Willmers opened the curtains of both the windows. The bright rays of the autumn sun streamed into the room. Ernestine stretched out her hands towards them, and said, "Oh, glorious light! How long shall I look upon you? How soon will your warm rays kiss the flowers upon my grave? Shall the blessed look upon the face of God? This beautiful smiling world is his face, and blessed indeed are they who may still look upon it and recognise God. Ah,

Willmers, life is such a gift! It is truly valued by those who stand looking down into their open graves, as I do; and I think I was never so worthy to live as now when it is too late."

She clasped her hands over her eyes and burst into tears. "If I could only hope to go to eternal peace upon a Father's loving, forgiving heart, I would gladly die. I long for His love. All feel His presence, and look to Him. But I dare not approach Him. I should be thrust out."

"Dear Fräulein Ernestine," said Willmers, "you are still ill, and that is the cause of these gloomy thoughts. If you would only talk with Professor Möllner, he would know better how to answer you than such a simple old woman as I."

"When is Dr. Möllner coming again?"

"He is here with his mother. They came here to stay, that they might take care of you, and the lady has done all she could to help her son. Oh, how anxious and unhappy they have been about you! The Professor would not stir from your bedside, and he looks quite ill with constant watching."

Ernestine cast down her eyes with emotion.

"May I not ask him to come in now?" asked Willmers.

"Pray do so."

Willmers did not have to go far. He was already at the door.

"Ernestine, how are you?" he said, doing his best to appear composed.

"Well, dear friend." And she smiled, and held out her hand to him. "What have you not done for me! How can a dying woman thank you for such self-sacrifice?"

"Ernestine," cried Johannes, pressing her hand to his lips, "you are in error. I myself led you into it, and severely has God punished me for my imprudence. Everything that I told you of your physical condition was founded upon mistaken suppositions. What I thought a symptom of chronic disease was nothing but the approach of an acute attack of illness. Two physicians, Heim and Maurice

Kern, pronounce your heart sound, and you are now out of danger. Oh, Ernestine, you cannot dream what my sufferings have been! I saw you writhing in mortal agony. All your fancies betrayed the terror into which I had plunged you. I would have rescued you from it, but you could not hear nor understand me. I offered you the truth that would save you from destruction, and you could not open your ears to receive it. It was too much, too much!"

"Then I need not die?" asked Ernestine with a long breath, as if awaking from an oppressive dream.

"On my honour, Ernestine, you are quite out of danger."

She could not speak. She could only look fondly and gratefully at the blue heavens outside the window. Then she silently pressed Möllner's hand to her breast, and the large tears gathered in her eyes.

The mother of Johannes then entered. "May I come in?" she asked. "May I say good-morning to the invalid?"

Ernestine drew the old lady towards her, put her arm around her, and whispered, "You have so much to forgive, but you granted me your forgiveness before I could ask you for it. I feel so humiliated beside you, I will not conceal the shame this confession causes me. It is your only reward for all that you have done for me."

"She has been purified in the terrible furnace that she has passed through!" said his mother to Johannes, who was looking down enraptured upon the pale, beautiful features, once more animated by the clear light of reason.

"I thank you all, and you too, dear Willmers. Every breath that I draw of this new gift of life shall be full of gratitude to you and"—she looked timidly upwards—"to God. In that dark, dark night of horror, I felt that His hand prostrated me, and now His hand lifts me up again. Oh, yes, He is a merciful God!"

"Then, Ernestine," said Johannes, "a blessing has come even from the terror that I caused you,—the blessing of faith."

"Yes, dear friend, you were right when you said, 'To

some God comes in fear.' You were right in everything, and I am only a woman?" Her head drooped. She was exhausted.

Johannes and his mother looked significantly at each other: joy beamed in their eyes. It seemed to them that Ernestine was born again.

The blessed relief that followed this brief conversation kept the invalid sunk in profound sleep all the rest of the day.

When Heim came towards evening, he would not even see her, lest he should disturb the repose which was, as he said, the best medicine she could take.

At nightfall she opened her eyes, and saw Johannes sitting beside her.

"Are you still with me?" she asked.

"I am always with you, Ernestine. I shall never leave you," he said with fervour.

Her eyelids closed, and she was silent, but her breath came quickly. He saw that his words had excited her, and he resolved carefully to avoid in future every syllable that could possibly disturb the perfect repose of her mind.

He left the room, that she might become composed. Willmers persuaded her to take some nourishment, and she fell asleep again without a word.

She was so much refreshed the next morning that Johannes breakfasted with his mother for the first time for many days, and assured her that he confidently hoped now for Ernestine's speedy recovery.

"Thank God!" ejaculated the old lady fervently. "Since yesterday I have seen how dear she may become to me. I acknowledge now that you, my son, understood this rare creature better than I did. But where are Gretchen and Hilsborn? Why do they not come to breakfast?"

"They are taking a turn together in the garden. How happy they are!"

"God willing, we shall soon have a double wedding in N——."

"Ah, mother, yours are daring dreams!" cried Johannes.

"Why not? Be sure, my son, she will soon be well again. Her constitution, both mental and physical, is strong. In two weeks your holidays will be at an end, and then we will carry her back to town with us, and when her trousseau, that I shall provide, is complete, there will be no need of delay?"

"Why, mother, you yourself have just said that her mind is as vigorous as her body. I shall never believe she can be mine until she is actually my affianced bride."

"Ah, Maurice and Angelica!" cried Madam Möllner, rising to meet them as they entered.

Angelica kissed her mother and brother. She was, if possible, plumper and rosier than ever.

"Ah!" laughed Maurice, "we frightened you for nothing yesterday. I know—I know all about it from Heim. Your coy damsel has come to her senses. I congratulate you! If she can be cured of the rest of her brain-sickness, why, Heaven speed the wooing! There'll be no getting any good out of you until you are married."

Angelica put her plump little hand over his mouth. "Can you not leave poor Johannes in peace?"

Maurice kissed the soft, warm gag placed upon his lips, and freed himself from it.

"'Poor Johannes!' Why poor? He's sure of her now. She hasn't a penny. Let her thank Heaven that there is a comfortable home ready for her, and she'll snap. No one can accuse her of stupidity," said Maurice.

Johannes and his mother looked grave, but did not speak, and he went on, "I can't conceive how she withstood you so long. You're the very hero for a novel,—too sentimental for my taste, but that's just what women like, and if I were a woman I'd have you on the spot."

"Thank you kindly, Maurice," said Johannes gaily, "but make your mind easy,—I certainly would not have you."

"Oh, please stop! you do nothing but quarrel when you are together," said Angelica merrily. "You are both good and true, each after his own fashion, and I love you both dearly. What more do you want?"

"All right," said Maurice, contemplating the fair little

figure with immense satisfaction. "If you love us, I am entirely content. It is only your discontented brother who is not satisfied."

"Angelica knows well enough," said Johannes, "what she is to me!"

Here Willmers appeared. "Professor! Fräulein Ernestine is awake, and is asking for her 'pretty young nurse,' as she calls her. Shall I go for Fräulein Gretchen?"

"Yes," said Johannes, "but I must tell her who Gretchen is,—you will excuse me?"

"Yes, yes, go, for Heaven's sake! don't wait an instant!" Maurice called after him.

"Ernestine," said Johannes, after he had exchanged morning greetings with the invalid, whose improvement was evidently steady and sure, "Ernestine, you wish to see the young girl who was here yesterday, and I must first tell you who she is. Do you still cherish any affection for your uncle?"

Ernestine shook her head. "He is dead to me."

"I have something to tell you of him that may agitate you, and I scarcely dare do it."

"What can agitate me, after all the terrors that my own fancy has conjured up?" Ernestine asked composedly.

"Well, then, the girl who has helped to nurse you with touching fidelity for the last four weeks is Leuthold's daughter, and—an orphan!"

"Good God!" she exclaimed. "Poor child! Is Leuthold dead?"

"Yes, he inflicted upon himself the punishment of his crimes. This world is past for him."

Ernestine looked up gravely. "I cannot mourn him. He was my evil genius, and shamefully abused my confidence. But I will not visit it upon his daughter,—poor innocent child. I pray you bring her to me,—she is the only creature in this world who is linked to me by the tie of kindred!"

Johannes went to the window and beckoned to Gretchen, who was approaching the house with Hilsborn.

She came instantly, and a minute later was upon her

knees at Ernestine's bedside. Ernestine would have drawn her towards her, but she sobbed, "Let me kneel at your feet,—only so should the daughter of one who greatly wronged you dare to approach you."

"Gretchen, poor, innocent orphan," cried Ernestine, "come to my heart!" Then, regarding her with emotion, she declared, "Indeed, if anything could lighten his errors, it would be his affection for such a child. For the sake of that pure human love, I forgive him. If I were rich, I would share all with you as with a sister. If I had anything to give, I would give it to you. But I have nothing for you, except sympathy and affection."

And the two girls were clasped in each other's arms.

CHAPTER V.

RETURN.

WITH re-awakening strength, entirely novel feelings of affection and interest penetrated Ernestine's nature,—genuine human sympathies, such as her life hitherto had afforded no room for. In a few days, the closest intimacy was established between herself and Gretchen. There was a simplicity about Ernestine that no one had believed her to possess. It was as if she now began to live for the first time: as if during the long period of her unconsciousness she had forgotten her former experience of the outer world, and she was as delighted as a child with all that unfolded itself before her eyes. She was as charmed with the sight of the clear autumn sky, as if she had never seen it before. She would gaze long and thoughtfully upon the flowers that were laid upon her bed. She eagerly turned over, with Gretchen, the books of rare prints that Johannes brought for her amusement. Hitherto she had known Art only by name, and without an idea of its significance. Her uncle had never supplied food for her imagination, lest she should be turned aside from the pursuit of her graver studies. Her weary soul now bathed in the waters of fancy which Johannes unlocked for her refreshment. He brought her photographs of pictures and statues by famous masters, and ideas of the beautiful were awakened within her, filling her with glad inspiration. Gretchen met her with ready sympathy,—she was in advance of her, indeed, and could point out to her many beauties that otherwise would have escaped her unpractised eyes. At such times Ernestine would regard Gretchen with admiration and surprise. It was a pleasure to see the two girls throwing their whole souls into these

new enjoyments together. Even Hilsborn, who since Ernestine's convalescence had naturally been defrauded of many a delightful moment, could not grudge them so pure and true a happiness. Sometimes from morning until night the two lovely heads would be bent together over books and prints, and sometimes they had a companion, Leonhardt, who would come "on purpose," as he expressed it, "to see the new books." But his delight was in listening to Ernestine while she described the pictures minutely, oftentimes with so much truth and spirit that the old man would clasp his hands and cry, "How beautiful that must be!"

"Do you see it, Father Leonhardt?" she would ask in her zeal, and the old man would reply delightedly, "Yes, I see it!"

And when anything pleased him particularly, he would ask, "Show me that picture again!" and Ernestine was unwearied in her descriptions and explanations.

Johannes and his mother were enchanted with this rejuvenescence, as it might be called.

She avoided with secret dislike any return to her former world of thought,—it was too harsh a contrast to her present delight,—she seemed disgusted with the anatomical pursuits which had led her to the dissecting table, and would not again descend into those gloomy depths whence she had drawn nothing but despair. All that she now looked upon was as novel and strange as if she had spent the last ten years immured in a tower, from which she had only looked out upon God's fair world at a distance.

Her recovery advanced so rapidly that eight days after her first awaking to consciousness she was able to be carried by Johannes and Gretchen into the library, once more restored to order and comfort by the faithful care of Willmers. She was placed in an arm-chair, and, as Madam Möllner covered her with a warm, soft coverlet, she said in a weak voice, "Now let us begin where we left off ten years ago?"

Madame Möllner stooped, and, kissing her brow, whispered softly, "It is a pity so much time has been lost!"

"Oh, no,—not a pity," replied Ernestine. "No time spent in searching after truth is lost; but the measure of my strength is exhausted. I must give up the pursuit."

With a melancholy smile, she leaned back her head and was silent.

The days passed on, and the time approached when Möllner must return to his duties in town. Ernestine grew more silent and thoughtful. No one could understand the change in her mood, for her physical condition improved daily, while she fell into a state of depression such as had not befallen her since she began to recover. At last Heim decreed that she must have fresh air, and one warm noon she drove out for the first time. She had begged that Gretchen alone might accompany her, and the Möllners had, although unwillingly, acceded to her request. Johannes, however, carefully lifted her into the carriage.

"Gretchen," said Ernestine, as they drove along, "Dr. Möllner has twice alluded to the fact that in two or three days he, with his mother, must move back to town, as his lectures at the University will recommence. You heard how they took it for granted that we should accompany them. I made only evasive answers, but now I must resolve what to do. Gretchen, you have often told me that your peace of mind depended upon your helping to support me as long as I needed you." She looked searchingly at the girl. "What if I were to take you at your word?"

"I would keep it; for I gave it not only to you, but to God Almighty," said Gretchen. "Tell me, Ernestine, what I can do for you."

"Everything!" cried Ernestine. "You can save me from living upon charity."

"How so?"

"Can you not imagine, Gretchen, what it must be to me to accept further benefits from people whom I long to repay in kind, whom I would like to reward a thousandfold for all that they have done for me? I do not know whether you understand me when I tell you that I would far rather earn

my living by the work of my hands than depend upon the kindness of those whom I once treated so arrogantly, and who have already heaped more coals of fire upon my head than I can bear. You shake your head. Your father, Gretchen, would have understood me,—his words upon this subject, the evening before he left me, are ineffaceably impressed upon my mind."

"Forgive me, Ernestine, it does not become me to depreciate my father still further in your eyes, but I cannot be silent! I have arrived at the melancholy conviction that my father never advised you well. He was wrong in this also. He did not know Doctor Möllner,—he had no conception of the depth and truth of his affection for you. Will you reward the man who has done so much for you by making him wretched? You certainly will do so if you refuse to go with him. No, Ernestine, I do not understand how you can break a man's heart just for the sake of your pride!"

Ernestine did not speak for a few moments, and then she said, "Gretchen, you are a child,—I cannot explain to you that there is a principle of honour to which one must sacrifice the happiness of a life, should circumstances demand it. You know, perhaps, that when I was wealthy and independent, Möllner offered me his hand and that I refused it, because I could not fulfil the conditions that he proposed. Since that time his conduct has failed to assure me that he still loves me; for a nature as noble as his is perfectly capable of sacrificing all that he has for me, from pure sympathy and mere compassion. And, even if he still loves me, can he value a heart open to the suspicion of surrendering itself under the pressure of necessity, and not from free choice? No, Gretchen, there can be no firm structure of happiness erected upon such a foundation. This is not the time when I can withdraw my refusal to be his wife! No, no! such a course at this point would fix the blush of shame upon my forehead for ever. Perhaps I may succeed in obtaining an independence by my own exertions,—an independence that will again make me his equal. Then it will be different,—then he will know that I give myself to him from free

choice, not upon compulsion. If he should woo me then,—oh, Gretchen, it would be happiness that I scarcely dare to think of!”

Gretchen kissed a tear from Ernestine's pale cheek, and said gently, “You are not like anyone else; but you are always true and noble. I have no right to judge you. If you say, ‘Thus shall it be,’ I will submit. My only desire is to obey you.”

“You shall not obey me, Gretchen; but you shall be my guide in a world where I am a stranger,—you shall lend me your arm to support me until I can stand alone. Will you not?”

“Yes,” was the low reply. The girl was thinking of Hilsborn and his sorrow at the postponement of his hopes and of her own hopes also, and she tried to take heart and tell her cousin that she loved and was loved in return, and that she would be able to offer her an asylum. But Gretchen paused, and bethought herself. Ernestine would never accept from Hilsborn what she refused to receive from Möllner. She could not make such an offer without offending Ernestine, and, if Ernestine learned how matters stood with Gretchen, she would assuredly refuse all assistance or service from her that could delay her happiness with Hilsborn. For Ernestine's proud nature never could endure the thought of being a burden to anyone. Gretchen had felt all this from the first, and therefore had insisted that her betrothal should be kept secret from Ernestine. Could she tell her of it now? She controlled herself, and was silent.

“I will tell you my plan,” Ernestine began. “Of course I have given up the idea of going to America. I could never do what would be required of me there, without assistance; and, even if I could, I would not leave home and all that I love for the sake of mere fame. I will try to find a position as a teacher of natural science in some institution, or, failing that, I will go out as a private governess. But I know how ignorant I am of everything that is looked for from a woman in such a position. I know nothing of feminine occupations myself, and, of course, am quite unfit to have the entire charge of children. I understand no art,

—I am deficient in all practical knowledge,—the knowledge that I possess is seldom needed in life. This I have learned since I have seen something of the world. You, Gretchen, are my only hope. You will teach me everything,—you are a proficient in all that a woman should know. I must leave this place. I must get away from this part of the country. Until I am out of Möllner's reach, there will be no peace either for him or for me. He would always be thinking that he ought to take me from my position, and there would be endless struggles. So I think it would be better that we two should retire to some small town, as far off as my means will permit, and then, if you would sacrifice to me a few months of your young, hopeful life, until I should be sufficiently far advanced to procure a situation—” She got so far with difficulty, and then, breaking off, asked humbly, “Is this asking too much of you? The world is open to you, Gretchen. Every one would welcome you back from your seclusion. Möllner's house will always be a home for you, where you may be tenderly cared for. Will you sacrifice all this to me for a little while?”

“With all my heart,” said Gretchen. “But, dearest Ernestine, have we the means to carry out this plan? All that I possess is three gold pieces that I found in the pocket of the dress that my mother gave me. Look, here they are—I always carry them about me. My mother had written upon the paper in which they were wrapped, ‘To be used in case of necessity.’ I meant to spend them for you; for you are all the ‘necessity’ that I have. Take them,—they are all that I have, but I am afraid they will not go far.”

“Thank you, you dear, faithful, little sister!” cried Ernestine. “We are not so poor as you think. Doctor Möllner has succeeded in saving all my furniture from your father's creditors. The sale of it will bring us in a sum sufficient to support us until I shall find a situation.”

“The question is, then, how long that will be,” said Gretchen, thoughtfully.

“Only a few months at the longest, I should suppose.”

Gretchen was startled, but she only said gently, “Then we had better select a place where I too can earn some-

thing, that there may be no danger of our suffering from want."

"That shall be as you think best," replied Ernestine. "I put myself entirely in your hands,—only take me away secretly, so that no one may seek to detain us."

"Must no one know anything of it? Must I tell nobody?"

"Do you suppose we should be allowed to go, Gretchen, if our intention were suspected? If you are afraid that you cannot keep our departure secret, tell me so frankly, and I will go alone, without your knowledge."

"Oh, no, Ernestine, I will not let you go out into the world alone. What are all my resolutions and protestations worth if I fail you at the outset? But there is one person, Ernestine, to whom I owe a certain obedience, my guardian! I am not of age, as you are. I cannot do just as I please. I must ask him whether I may go with you; but I will answer for his secrecy. He shall promise me, before I confide in him, that he will not betray my confidence,—and he always keeps his promises."

Ernestine considered for a moment. "Yes; I see this cannot be avoided. I rely upon you. Johannes and his mother are going to drive into town together in a few days to prepare a room for us in their house. When they return in the evening, they must not find us here."

"I cannot help feeling," said Gretchen, "as if I were guilty of treachery towards all these kind people. I never deceived anyone in my life before; I feel like a criminal."

"We will not deceive them, only spare them a parting scene that would be painful to us all,—we will not impose upon them the necessity of preventing us from adopting that course which in their hearts they may think best for us. When we are once away I will write and explain to them what we have done, and they will understand me."

"Ernestine, I will pray God to give you more love and less pride. My only hope is that you will not long be able to live without the faithful friend who loves you so devotedly."

Ernestine looked out of the carriage-window without a

word. The fields were bare and deserted, but the spiders' webs, that lay like nets upon the stubble, glistened in the sunlight. Here and there the peasants were burning weeds, and the red flames darted with a merry crackle through the thick white smoke that the autumn breeze kept low upon the ground. The cattle were gleaning a scanty meal from the shorn pastures,—they raised their heads to look after the carriage as it passed, or to rub their necks against some dried old stump of a tree. In the distance a sportsman was making his toilsome way through the deep furrows of a ploughed field, while his dog busied himself among the hedges until he started a covey of birds, and the fatal crack of the gun was heard. A wagon, laden high with full wine-casks, passed along the road,—the boy that was driving had a bunch of withered asters in his hat, and cracked his whip gaily at sight of Gretchen's lovely face, while the little dog perched on the top of the load barked angrily. "Everyone is making ready for winter," said Gretchen. "How much labour meat and drink cost!"

The carriage turned towards the village, and Ernestine called to the coachman to stop at the school-house,—“I must see the Leonhardts once more.” As they reached the low-roofed house, one of the windows was opened, and Brigit looked out. “Good-morning, Frau Leonhardt,” cried Ernestine from the carriage.

“My dear Fräulein Ernestine, I can hardly trust my eyes!” And out she came to the carriage-door. “Come in, come in, both of you,—I will bring Bernhard—he is with Katie in the garden. But Walter is in the house. He is so happy with the things you have sent him! He studies night and day!” Thus the old woman ran on, as she assisted her guests to alight.

“I think,” said Ernestine, “that I should like to go into the garden to Father Leonhardt.”

“Just as you please. He is sitting round the corner, in the sun.”

“Go into the house, then, Gretchen,” said Ernestine. “I will come in one moment.”

She went round the house as quickly as her strength

would permit, and approached the old man, who was teaching Katie her lesson. The child would have run to meet her; but Ernestine motioned to her not to speak, and knelt silently down by Leonhardt.

"Who is this," he asked.

Ernestine made no reply, but imprinted a kiss upon his hand. He smiled. "Oh, it is my daughter Ernestine!"

"Yes father, it is I," she said. "I come to you the first time that I have driven out. There is much within me that is still dark. I come to you for light."

"You bring me light, and do you ask me to give you light? But I know what you mean, and I will give you all that I have. Heaven may make me, poor blind old man, its instrument in comforting and assisting you. Tell me, then, Ernestine, why does the sunshine that now floods your life fail to penetrate your heart?"

"Send the child away, father."

"Go, Katie dear," Leonhardt said.

"To Walter?" the little girl asked, delighted.

"Yes, if he is not busy. See that you do not trouble him."

Katie still lingered, with a look of inquiry at Ernestine, who perceived it, and held out her hand. "My good little Katie, do you remember me? I would like to give you a kiss, but you might fear my touch would do you harm."

"Oh, no. That cannot be," said Katie. "I am not at all afraid of you."

"Then come here, my sweet child." And she took her upon her lap, and kissed her kindly. It was the first time that she had ever had a child in her arms, and the pleasure that it gave her was new and strange.

"Oh, Father Leonhardt," she said, "how many different kinds of love there are! Strange that they all seem so new and delightful to me!"

"You are like the man with the heart of stone in Hauff's story. Your uncle put a marble heart in your breast, and Möllner has given you a warm, living heart instead."

Ernestine blushed at these words. She was glad that Leonhardt could not see her, yet he did see her.

"He brings a blessing wherever he comes," the old man continued. "He has done everything for this child. Did he tell you? The Countess Worronska sent the forty thousand roubles, as she promised, and Doctor Möllner succeeded at last in persuading the Kellers to send Katie to a good school. She will leave now in about a week."

"I knew nothing of it," said Ernestine.

"It is not his custom to speak of the good he does," said Leonhardt, "but indeed he is a benefactor to all."

"A benefactor to all," Ernestine repeated thoughtfully. "All the less should any one individual boast of his kindness,—a kindness shown to all, without respect of persons."

Leonhardt involuntarily turned his darkened eyes towards her as she spoke thus. "Go, Katie," he said, "Fräulein Ernestine will come by-and-by."

Katie went into the house, and not finding Walter in the sitting-room, mounted to his study, in the upper story, just under the roof. She nestled up to his side and said, with an air of great mystery, "Only think! the lady of the castle has kissed me again!"

"Not possible!" laughed Walter. "And do you feel nothing queer?"

"Of course not," Katie cried in some confusion. "She can't bewitch me."

"I wouldn't like to try her," said Walter, with an involuntary sigh. "I think, if I had been in your place, I should have felt the enchantment instantly."

"Why, you told me yourself there was no such thing," said Katie.

"Well, Katie," said the young man, "it would be as well, perhaps, for the sake of precaution, that I should kiss away her kisses. Where was it?—here?"

"Yes; and here on my forehead, and on my cheek."

"There, we will put an end to all that," cried Walter, as he kissed the child. "And now go down-stairs. I must work."

"Oh, you always have to work," Katie complained.

"Yes, you school-children have the best time of it, with nothing to do but laugh and play, while I have all the

studying. Go now, and when the young lady comes in from the garden, mind and call me."

"Yes, I'll call you. Good-by. But promise me that you won't tell that the Fräulein kissed me. They would all scold and laugh at me."

"Oh, no,—not for the world. Where's the use of telling everything? But you mustn't love the Fräulein better than you do me, or I will tell your mother."

"Oh, no. I love you best of all the world!" cried Katie shutting the door behind her with emphasis. She had been but a few moments with Gretchen and Brigit when Ernestine entered with Leonhardt. Both looked agitated, and Ernestine's eyes bore traces of tears.

Katie would have gone to call Walter, as she had been told to do.

"Stay, Katie," said Ernestine, "I will go up to Herr Leonhardt myself and see what he is doing."

She took Father Leonhardt's arm, and with him ascended the narrow staircase.

Walter sprang up, with flushed cheeks, when Ernestine and his father entered his room.

"Have you come up here?" he exclaimed, "you, before whom I stand humbly as a mere pupil,—revering you almost as the very personification of Science?"

"Do not speak thus, Walter,—you do not know what you are saying. I have obtained a victory over self after a sore struggle, and will content myself with my lot as a woman; but I am weak, and such speeches might easily rouse again within me the demon of ambition. You mean kindly, but, now that I stand on the borders of the realm I have forsaken, I must not listen to any voice recalling me to that dear old home. I have come to take leave of you. Your father will tell you wherefore and whither I am going."

"Oh, Fräulein Ernestine, are you going away? and are you going to give up your studies too?"

"I must resign them, Walter, or at least all scientific pursuits. My knowledge must be to me now a means of support, and in these days it can serve me only in the position of a governess. I must content myself with

teaching in a girls' school. Men do not want women for professors, and no man wants a professor for a wife. The world is not what I dreamed,—there is no place in it for a woman's efforts, and I am too weak to create one for myself."

"What a shame it is," said Walter, "that such a woman should need to create a place for herself! she should be placed upon a pedestal and worshipped, if only for the sake of such a mind in such a body."

Leonhardt laid his hand in warning upon the boy's arm.

"Father, I must speak," he went on. "I must give some relief to the indignation that fills me at the idea of such a nature being condemned to battle with the world for the bare means of subsistence."

Ernestine hid her face in her hands, and sighed heavily.

Leonhardt shook his head disapprovingly at his son. "It is not kind, Walter, to make the sacrifice harder than it need be. Ernestine is, and always must be, noble, and never was she nobler than in her present resolution. We cannot change the world, Walter, and Ernestine is a woman,—she must submit."

"Yes, submit!" she repeated, and there was keen pain in her accents.

"Fräulein Ernestine," Walter implored, "forgive me if I have revived buried griefs. I meant well,—I cannot tell you what pain it gives me to see you giving up what is so dear to you, and for me your going is like the departure of his muse from the poet,—the vanishing of his saint from the devotee."

"Walter," said Ernestine gravely, "your words tempt me sorely, but, I hope, for the last time. I will resist them, and when you are older you will know why I do so. You are very young, Walter. It is not long, scarcely six weeks, since I was so too. In this short time I have grown older by six years, and the world and mankind are changed in my eyes,—I must struggle now for the common means of subsistence."

She went to the bookshelves, on which the bright rays of the sun were just falling. "Yes, dear old Darwin, your famous name still shines brightly upon me. I now begin to understand you and to appreciate the import of your teachings."

She held out her hand to Walter, with tears in her eyes. "Thank you for the opportunity of trying my strength for one moment. It has been a melancholy satisfaction. A bright future is before you; if I have contributed in any degree to the realization of your hopes in life, I will descend cheerfully from the heights I dreamed of,—I have not lived in vain. I must go."

She looked around the room. Wherever her glance fell, it rested upon some of her books or instruments. "Keep all these things for me, Walter,—perhaps I may reclaim them at some future day." Again tears filled her eyes. She knew she was never again to possess what had been so long the sole joy of her life. "No, let them go. I release from my service the spirits prisoned in these instruments that have brought the stars near to me, and revealed the hidden mysteries of the earth to my eager eyes. They can serve me no longer,—I must return to the every-day world,—the spell is broken,—knowledge and sight are mine no longer."

She left the room noiselessly, and her old friend followed her.

A quarter of an hour later, the carriage rolled away from the school-house towards the castle, and the Leonhardts, father and son, stood on the threshold, the one gazing after the distant carriage, the other listening intently to the last sound of its wheels.

Ernestine, sunk in thought, was leaning back in the vehicle, when she suddenly called upon the coachman to stop. They were just passing the church.

"Stay here and wait for me," she said to Gretchen; "I must go in here for a moment."

She got out, and went to the door, which stood ajar. Her hand lingered on the latch. What impelled her thus irresistibly to enter this poor little village church?—Memory!

All the events, thoughts, experiences, of the last ten years were hung around the lowly portal, like a brodered curtain. Again she stood before the church-door of her northern home, a trembling, longing, doubting, despairing child. "Enter, and learn to kneel," the same voice within that spoke then was speaking now. And she entered, softly and timidly. The church was empty and quiet,—the people were all at their work. The floor was strewn with green box twigs from the last holiday, and the atmosphere was filled with the odour of incense. Through the painted window the sun threw many-coloured rays upon a picture of the Virgin and Child. A swallow, scared from his summer's nest in the tower, flew circling above Ernestine's head, like the heavenly dove, the Spirit of Comfort and Peace. Ernestine slowly passed the quiet confessionals, where so many sorrow-laden hearts had unburdened themselves of their weight of woe, and received forgiveness in the name of the Lord. "To Him," breathed the voice within, and she passed with quickened steps over the soft, leaf-strewn floor, directly to the altar. Was it the same at which she had knelt and wept ten years before? Perhaps not; but He was the same Divine One whose image looked down from the cross, touching her heart now as it touched it then. She knew now that through all these years she had been treading a weary circle, and had come back at last to the point at which she had been ten years before.

Then she extended her arms, and falling upon her knees, exclaimed, "Father, I have returned,—receive me!—receive me, my Father, my God!"

CHAPTER VI.

"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."

"WHAT a hard winter we are having!" said Ernestine to herself, looking thoughtfully out through the dim panes of the little window by which she was sitting, upon the roofs of the houses that bounded her prospect. They were covered with snow, that lay thick also on the outside window-sill. She sat with her hands wrapped in her cotton apron. "Well, I wanted to know everything, and now I have made acquaintance with poverty, and hunger, and cold, the mighty foes against which humanity is always contending! I could philosophize excellently well upon abstinence in a warm room, by a well-spread table, and shall I shrink from it now? No, indeed! no living soul shall ever hear me ask for help."

She stood up, and walked firmly to and fro.

The room was a gloomy garret, a kind of kitchen,—at all events, there was a cooking-stove in it, and a cupboard containing articles of crockery. The floor was paved with bricks.

Ernestine's feet were bitterly cold. "I wonder what o'clock it is," she thought. "The postman ought to be here soon. It is terrible to have no means of marking the time."

She listened to catch the striking of a church-clock, going to the window and letting her eyes wander over the white roofs in search of a distant tower. There was no sun visible through the snowy air. It was a genuine winter's day.

At a window just opposite, a little boy breathed upon the frosty pane and made two round peep-holes, through which a pair of blue eyes beamed at her. She nodded to them—

she knew the pretty child well. The little head behind the peep-holes nodded in its turn. She thought of Little Kay and her northern winter. Then the snow before the window rose like white clouds hiding the prospect, and gradually taking a human shape clothed in wide flowing robes, that began to sparkle and glitter as if strewn with diamonds; and a veil of frozen gossamer fluttered in the air. And beneath the veil there looked at her through the window a white face, with fixed transparent eyes like crystal, and upon the beautiful brow was a diadem of icicles made of the tears of all who had perished in the ice and snow since the world was made, and of all who starve and freeze in winter time,—a diadem richer in pearls than that of any earthly monarch. The mighty form had on one arm a shield,—but it was a plate of the ice upon which had been wrecked the ships that sought to penetrate the inhospitable kingdom of the Snow-queen around the north pole. With the other hand she was leading away the little boy from over the way,—she longed for some coral to adorn her colourless robes, for a few drops of warm human blood. It was the Snow-queen of the fairy dreams of Ernestine's childhood. But she was more majestic and gloomy than formerly, and she spoke other words to her now :

"I know you. You never feared me as you do now that you have no warm roof, no firm walls, to protect you from my icy breath. But I will not harm you, you belong to those who believe in the future of my dominion, who know that in thousands and thousands of years I must reign over the whole world, when all this teeming life will have passed to other spheres. Then my time will come,—there will be eternal icy quiet here below,—and I will laugh at the old extinguished sun, glimmering like a burnt-out coal, and envying me my diamond palace which he can no longer melt away."

Thus spoke the Snow-queen to the dreaming woman of science, and there was a cold pain at her heart,—sorrow for the end of Being here below, sorrow at "the judgment-day of an eternal glacial period," as Du Bois has it.

The Snow-queen had vanished, and Little Kay with her,

—a thick snow-storm hid from view the path that she had taken.

Slowly and weakly, as if the clock were frozen and could thaw only by degrees, twelve o'clock struck from the church-tower.

Ernestine did not hear it. She sat with her head leaning against the window. The voice of the Snow-queen sounded in her ears, "Open your eyes, and see!"

And she opened her eyes, and saw across billions of years. The sun, its fires only dimly burning, hung, a bloody disk in the skies, heavy brooding clouds were tinged with dull red, and twilight rested over the cold earth. Upon its hardened surface only a few wretched imbruted creatures crawled, seeking to sustain life upon the scanty remains of a decaying vegetation.

Sadly Ernestine closed her eyes upon the painful picture.

But she was again commanded to look abroad. Centuries swept on, and all grew darker and colder. The red disk faded, and all colour with it. Ernestine marked it all vanish in a dull gray. Weary with fruitless struggle, the last remains of organic life lay down in eternal rest.

It was night at last. Still the earthly sphere performed its appointed circuit around the charred mass that was once its sun. But the mighty firmament was clear and cloudless,—the lifeless earth exhaled no mists to obscure the light of the distant stars, which revealed to Ernestine immeasurable depths and immense heights of frozen seas and oceans amid eternal repose,—the world was only a gigantic memorial of things that had been.

"But where, and in what guise, linger the transformed forces of this spent world?" asked Ernestine. "Nothing in the great Universe is lost."

"Ah! good heavens! here you are sitting dreaming in this cold kitchen!" said a clear, bright voice. "No fire on the hearth,—no dinner made; or, let me see,—yes,—but how? Burnt to a cinder. My dear Ernestine, what have you been doing?"

Ernestine had sprung up, and was staring at the speaker as if she had come from another world.

Gretchen, for she it was, laid aside a couple of school-books that she had under her arm, threw off her cloak and hood, and busied herself with the neglected soup. "I understand,—first of all you kindled a huge fire, and then you never gave it another thought. The soup is not skimmed, and the beef is burned, and yet half raw. You cannot have looked at it for at least an hour."

"It is such a pity that we had to sell my watch," Ernestine excused herself. "I never know now how the time goes."

"Nonsense!" said Gretchen, "you can surely tell without a watch whether the soup boils and the fire burns or not. Only try, and all will go right. You have often proved that you can really cook quite well if you will only take pains. But I cannot trust you with soup and beef again,—you forget everything when once you begin to dream."

"Gretchen, don't be angry," pleaded Ernestine.

"But here is all the food spoiled that was so hardly earned, and we have not a single copper in the house, and shall not have, until my money is paid to-morrow." Tears of vexation came into Gretchen's eyes. "I care more about you than about myself. I am strong, and do not need meat; but you,—indeed you ought to think of yourself if not of me!"

Ernestine, in her confusion, looked from the saucepan to Gretchen, and from Gretchen to the saucepan, in dismay. "You are right," she said,—“it is unpardonable of me not to take care that you, poor child, should have something hot and good when you come home wearied from your work. Indeed I am a useless creature!"

Gretchen was instantly appeased. She laughed, and threw her arms around Ernestine. "Ah! my beautiful, grand, intellectual sister, it is too bad to scold you! Just hear my queenly Ernestine sue for pardon, like some poor Cinderella, and all for a piece of burnt meat! Don't mind it, dear. You can't think how touching your humility is. Why, I could kneel at your feet, if you would let me." She kissed her sister's lips. "Oh, what a poor distressed face! Don't you know, dearest Ernestine, that the sight of that face is more to me than all the dinners in the world?" And she laughed as merrily as a child.

Ernestine returned her embrace. "There, you forgive me," she said tenderly.

"Oh, no, I beg your pardon," said Gretchen, "I will educate you. But enough of this. We must proceed to business at once. I must go back to school at two o'clock, and we cannot starve. We must give up the meat for to-day. There is no help for it. We must indulge ourselves in the luxury of an omelet."

"Let me make it," Ernestine begged. "Sit down and rest yourself, you are tired."

"What! let you make it?" asked Gretchen. "That would be wise indeed. Suppose you spoiled it, what should we do then?" And she took out a basket containing eggs. "We have just eggs enough for one omelet, and no more."

'Entränn' er jetzo kraftlos meinen Händen,
Ich habe keinen zweiten zu versenden,'

as Schiller makes Tell say when he had no second arrow to his bow."

"Indeed, Gretchen," pleaded Ernestine, "I will not spoil it. I should be so glad to recover your good opinion,—only let me try."

"Dearest, darling Ernestine," said Gretchen, "trust me, we cannot indulge in experiments any longer. While we had a little money, it did not make much difference if we had a spoiled dish now and then, but now we must save every farthing,—there is no help for it." And she began to beat the eggs, while Ernestine put more wood in the stove.

"Never mind that!" cried Gretchen. "If you want to do something, dress the salad. But make haste, the omelet will be ready in an instant."

Ernestine made all the haste she could,—she was so anxious to do something.

Suddenly Gretchen, who was busy at the fire, heard a low exclamation, and, turning, she saw Ernestine standing with a face of despair before the salad-bowl, with an oil-bottle in her hand. "What have you done?" cried Gretchen, hastening to her side. "Not got hold of the

wrong bottle, I hope!" But one sniff at the salad was enough. "Bless me! she has put paraffine into it! Now we must sit in the dark this evening,—our week's supply is exhausted. Such nice salad and such good paraffine, each so valuable by itself and so worthless when mixed! Now, dear Ernestine, you cannot ask me to let you stay in the kitchen a moment longer. This is one of your unlucky days." With a comical air of pathos, she untied and took off her sister's apron. "Herewith I solemnly depose you from your responsible office. You have to-day shown yourself entirely unworthy to wear this ornament. Now go into the next room, and wait quietly until I bring the omelet into you." She opened the door and led Ernestine from the room.

When she went to her, shortly afterwards, she found her sitting sewing, her eyes red with weeping. "Darling," she said to her, "I do believe you are crying about that trifle! I must be a little strict with you, you see, or you will never learn to economize and take care of things. Ernestine, dear, you are not vexed with me for scolding you? I was only in jest."

"How could I be vexed with you? I am crying because I am of no earthly use in the world! If it were not for you what would become of me? There is no child of eight years old more clumsy than I. Who would bear with me as you do! Do you think I am not humbled by these thoughts? For these last two months, ever since my money was exhausted, you have supported me by your hard work at the school, and I have been able to do nothing for you but prepare our frugal noonday meal while you are away, and now I cannot even do that! It is too dreadful! I have made the most complicated chemical combinations, and yet I cannot make decent soup? I have overcome the greatest difficulties, and yet these simple tasks are beyond me? This cannot go on. I promise you I will take myself in hand, and you shall not have to fast again when you come from school."

"My dear Ernestine, I do not believe you can ever learn these things. They are too far beneath you."

"My superiority is truly deplorable," replied Ernestine. "It does not help me to discharge the smallest duty. Difficulties always incite me, and now that I see how difficult these trifles are, I am determined to master them."

Gretchen handed her a piece of the omelet. "Now put away your work, or your dinner will be cold."

Ernestine laid aside the skirt upon which she was working. "I shall never get it together again. I wish I had not ripped it apart!"

"Why, you could never have worn it, with the front breadth so scorched. But I will help you this evening. It is my fault that you scorched it,—I should not have let you make the fire,—so it is no more than reasonable that I should help you to repair the injury. But Ernestine, dear, you do not eat."

"I have had enough. If you would have allowed me I could have made two omelets out of those eggs."

Gretchen laughed merrily. "Hear her say how much better she could have made it! Well, only wait, the day after to-morrow is Sunday, and I shall be at home, and then you may cook as much as you please, under my direction. That will be a real holiday for you."

"Ah, Gretchen, how often I think of Frau Möllner, when she wanted to teach me to prepare the beans for cooking, and I felt it an occupation so far beneath my dignity! I did not understand her then, but I have learned to do so now." She sat lost in sad reflections.

Gretchen looked at Ernestine's plate, and shook her head. "What shall I get for you that you can eat? I wish you would let me accept something now and then from my guardian. He would be so glad to assist us."

"Gretchen, I have nothing to do with what he gives you," said Ernestine gravely, "but no morsel that he sends us shall pass my lips, any more than I will accept one of the two dresses he sent you. I know I am severe, for I force you to starve with me, but, God willing,"—and she uttered the name of God with more reverence than is usually shown by those who have it constantly on their lips,—“this will not last much longer. I must surely obtain a situation soon,

and then you, you dear, faithful child, will be free to return to the Möllners, or whithersoever you choose, and begin to enjoy your young life. I will confess to you, Gretchen, that I wrote again, the day before yesterday, to the agent in Frankfort, begging him to do all he could for me. There must be a place for me somewhere in this wide world."

She threaded her needle with difficulty, and began to sew again. Two great tears fell upon her work, but she brushed them hastily away, that Gretchen might not see them.

"Dear Ernestine," Gretchen said, when she had carried away the plates, "I must go now, for half-past one has struck. Do not sew too long, and pray forget your sad thoughts. Some place for you is sure to offer. It would, no doubt, have been better if we could have lived in Frankfort, instead of coming here to Rotheim. Then you would have been able to see the people yourself. But the living there was too expensive, and I was certain of employment here. Oh, if people only knew you, they would seize upon you instantly. If I could but induce the good superior of the school to see you, she never could withstand you! Now good-by, dearest and best,—all good spirits protect you in the dark,—you know we have no light this evening!"

"Never mind that, Gretchen. I will think of father Leonhardt, who is always in the dark, whereas for us the sun will surely rise again."

"Yes indeed, Ernestine," Gretchen called back from the doorway, "always remember that,—'The sun will surely rise for us.'"

"In that sense? Who can tell?" Ernestine thought sadly.

She looked for a moment irresolutely at the little spider-legged table that served as dining and writing-table. She would so like to write to Walter. It was now over a week since she had heard from him, and her scientific correspondence with this young friend was her sole self-indulgence,—the only tie that still connected her with her former pursuits. In all his letters he told her of his progress, asked her opinion upon many points, and glowed with enthusiasm for her genius. She could scarcely withstand

the temptation to devote the time while it was yet light to writing. Her heart was still full of the wonderful dreams of the morning.

But she looked down at the skirt upon which she was working, and which she really stood in need of, and thought, "No, I was thoughtless this morning, and dreamed away the time, instead of cooking. I will be conscientious this afternoon, and work."

She seated herself, sighing heavily, at the window, and sewed on diligently. "Practice makes perfect," she had said in the essay that was to procure her admission to the lecture-room of the University. She never dreamed then how she was one day to prove the truth of the proverb. If she only had that essay now, she thought! She had forgotten to ask Dr. Möllner for it, and he had it still. What had he done with it? Should she reclaim it? No, assuredly not! He had written to her but once since her flight from Hochstetten, and had afterwards sent her the proceeds of the sale of her furniture, without one friendly word, transacting her business for her as formally as for a stranger. And what a letter that was after her flight! She took it out to read it once more, although she had read it already again and again:—

"I understand you, Ernestine. I expected this. It would have been unjust to our future to put force upon your feelings. God will one day guide me out of this dilemma. Until then, live in peace, and gratify a pride that I am now convinced nothing can break. Perhaps in time it may consume itself, and perhaps love may overcome it. I will bear, as I have learned to bear since I first knew you. There is a strength in you such as I never believed a woman could possess, and with which I know not how to contend. I do not grudge you the triumph that this confession affords you. It is a poor delight in comparison with that which love would yield you, if you did not scorn it. Ah, Ernestine, could I have snatched you from your poverty to my heart and home, my joy would have been beyond that of mortals. A grateful smile from you would have been more than worlds to me. But you do not choose to accept any sacrifice

from me, as you are resolved to make no sacrifice to me. You choose to be your husband's equal in all respects,—to owe nothing to any human being. I forgive you your pride in this respect, for it pre-supposes an exaggerated self-depreciation. As you think so lightly of yourself,—as you do not dream of your wealth of charms, of the power that you possess to bless and enrich,—you cannot believe that you can bestow a treasure to the worth of which the wealth of the world is nothing. Perhaps this is partly my fault. In my desire to deal truthfully with you, I have neglected to impress this fact upon you. But, Ernestine, it seems to me a true woman does not ask, 'How much do I receive, and what can I give in return?' She accepts in love what is offered in love, and is glad to owe everything to him to whom she is everything. She gives him all that she can, and never stints him of the dearest delight that he can have,—that of labouring and toiling for one so dear to him. She willingly wears the fetters of dependence, regarding them only as ties binding her more closely to the loved one. You cannot feel this, Ernestine. It would be unjust to require it of you, and you were wrong if you feared I should seek to detain you by force. I only used force to preserve you from a menacing peril. Now you are safe. The world into which you are going will be a school for you, and you have need of this school. Therefore, choose your own path, and prove your independence, your right to which you insist upon asserting. I would not exact what would be a blessing only as a free gift. There was no need of your leaving us as you did, without even a farewell to my mother, who had grown so fond of you and nursed you so tenderly. It pained her that you should do so.

"I will not speak of what I suffered upon my return from town to find you gone, leaving only those few lines of farewell. You are bent upon maintaining the dignity of your sex, and, in such an important undertaking, it is scarcely worth while to consider the wrecked happiness of one human life.

"Farewell, and, if I can serve you in anything, command me.

"JOHANNES."

When she first received this letter, she had sunk fainting into Gretchen's arms. Since then Möllner's name had never passed her lips, and almost five months had gone by. She had not allowed a thought of him to enter her mind, except when, as now, some other subject had brought him vividly before her, and then she punished herself by quickly turning her thoughts to other things. Whence came the tears that now trickled down her cheeks? Her cold, benumbed hands trembled as she wiped them away. She bravely choked them down, and thought—poor child!—that she was not crying, when she swallowed down the bitter drops that welled up from her heart. Such weeping is the bitterest of all.

The shades of night fell fast, and she could no longer see to sew. There was the end of a candle on the shelf, and she lighted it, but it scarcely burned half-an-hour before it died out, and she was left in darkness. She began to arrange the narrow beds that stood against the wall of the room, and, as she did so, thought of her good Willmers. How kind it was of Frau Möllner to take the faithful soul into her service! Fie! thinking of him again! What weakness! The little room grew darker and darker. The panes began to dull with frost, and the light from the neighbour's room opposite glittered in prismatic colours upon the ice-flowers and trees. They were wealthier over the way than Ernestine; for they could afford a light. They had not poured their paraffine on the salad, to be sure; but then they had not been visited by the Snow-queen! Ernestine sat down wearily by her bed, and rested her head on the pillow. She felt better when her body was in entire repose.

How wearily she had lain upon her soft bed six months ago in Hochstetten! And how anxious she had been to live! Would it have been so terrible to lose such a life as this? Then it seemed as if a strong, tender hand clasped hers, and she felt a quick, anxious breath upon her brow. She knew it well, and the gentle questioning that was sure to follow,—knew the firm, quiet pressure upon her heart to count its pulsations. And if she had only clasped it fast,—that strong, tender hand,—she would not now be sitting

here alone in the dark! "Oh, Johannes!" she gasped, and extended her arms. Then she heard a noise of someone stumbling upstairs,—that could not be Gretchen. There was a knock at the door. "Who is there?" cried Ernestine, frightened.

"Postman," a rough voice answered from without.

"Oh, a letter from the agent," thought Ernestine, opening the door.

"Four kreuzers," said the man, handing her a letter.

Ernestine stood aghast. "Is it not prepaid? I—I have not a single kreuzer in the world—we shall have no money until to-morrow."

"No kreuzers, and no light? Hm—hm! Such a beautiful lady, with no money in her pocket? Well, well, you can pay me to-morrow. I'll trust you until then."

"Thank you, you are very kind," Ernestine stammered, greatly ashamed. She was obliged to run in debt to the postman.

"Have you no light, to shew me the way downstairs? I shall break my legs or my neck upon these steep, narrow steps."

"I will lead you down. I know the way, and I must go down to read my letter by a street-lamp."

"Good God! what poverty! Go down to the people on the lower floor—they will give you a candle-end."

"No, I will not. They are not respectable people, and I will have nothing to do with them. The poorer one is, the prouder one must be—so as not to sink too low. You are a good man, Herr Bittner. Tell no one how poor we are."

"Not if you say so; but something ought to be done for you. I have seen what a hard time you have had of it ever since you came here. It's none of my business. I can only hope that there may be something good in the letter that I brought you,—and I do hope so, with all my heart. Good evening."

"God grant it!" said Ernestine, going into the street to read her letter by the gas-lamp there. A fine snow was falling again, and the passers-by looked at her in amaze-

ment. The colour mounted to her forehead; but she could not wait until morning to read this letter, which she felt sure contained her fate. It was from the Frankfort agent who was to procure a situation for her, and was short and to the point:—

“FRÄULEIN VON HARTWICH,—You wish me to tell you frankly how it is that I have as yet procured no situation for you. I will do so,—for I see in your note that you accuse me in your thoughts of a negligence that I should be sorry to be guilty of towards anyone,—least of all towards yourself.

“You yourself, unfortunately, Fräulein von Hartwich, furnish the reason why I have hitherto been unable to procure a situation for you. No agent in the world would be able to find a position as governess in a respectable family for a lady bearing such a reputation as yours. For their children’s sake people are unwilling to receive into their houses a person who has written as you have done against religion and in favour of the emancipation of woman. You assure me, I know, that you have altered your opinions, and that you yourself now condemn these writings. But no one will believe in such a forced conversion. Besides, in your advertisement in the papers you referred to the Vice-Chancellor of the University at N——, without giving any name. I can only conclude that you must have been mistaken in the person of the Vice-Chancellor, for the present holder of the office is a Professor Herbert, who gives the strongest possible testimony against you, and has already destroyed your prospects in three separate instances, by referring people to your books,—after reading which, no one would listen to a word in your behalf.”

Ernestine’s arms dropped by her sides. From delicacy she had suppressed Möllner’s name in the papers, entirely forgetting that the office of Vice-Chancellor was held but for a year by one person. She remembered how she had mortally offended Herbert on the only occasion when she

had met him, and she knew that this man's mortified vanity had made him her implacable foe. But that was a secondary matter. The blameless need fear no foe. It was her own fault that Herbert had the power to destroy her prospects. He had not maligned her, he had simply referred to the books she had written. She had herself whetted the knife that he had used against her. She had only herself to blame.

Never had the phantom of the past loomed so monstrously before her as now. There she stood,—she who had thought herself able to defy the world,—starving and freezing in the cold, reading by the light of a street lamp the anathema that society hurls at the woman who offends it. The iron wheels of conventionality, in the path of which she had so boldly thrown herself, had passed over her prostrate form. She was only a helpless, desolate, broken woman.

She was scarcely capable of reading any further. She held the sheet in her trembling hands, caring not to decipher the few words of condolence with which the agent closed his communication. The snow-flakes wetted the paper, so that the letters ran together, and in the wintry wind it fluttered to and fro in her hand.

Her feet were stiff with cold as she turned into the house again, and groped her way up the dark staircase. Gretchen's return was unusually delayed, and Ernestine longed so for her sympathy and advice.

What should she do? She could not permit her sister to sacrifice the best years of her life to her support. She could no longer be dependent upon the kindness of such a child. What should she attempt? Must she beg from door to door? How could she earn her own living, when she had been taught none of the arts by which to earn it? In these last few months Gretchen had taught her something of what was indispensable in such great need. She had never dreamed how difficult the things were that she had accounted so unimportant. She had come to the point where self-respect is imperilled in the struggle for mere subsistence. She wrung her hands, and called out into the darkness, "O

God, take pity on me, and guide me through this valley of the shadow of death!"

The bitter doubt whether He would listen to her cry rose within her heart. She reviewed in her mind the miserable superficial essays that she had written in denial of Him, and felt that she was justly punished. How little had she thought, when exulting in the attention that they had excited, that she should ever feel herself disgraced by the authorship! As yet, she had uttered no reproach against her uncle. He had expiated by his death his theft of her property, but his crime against her soul he could never expiate,—this it was that now branded him with infamy in her memory. What a happy woman she might now have been, if he had not misdirected her ambition! What friends might have been hers, had he not made a misanthrope of her! and now, when starvation stared her in the face, the demon of his teaching snatched from her lips the bread that she might have earned.

When Gretchen at last returned, she found Ernestine crouching upon the hearth, gazing into the fire that she had kindled to warm her wet feet, and to cook the evening meal.

"What are you doing, Ernestine dear?" she asked anxiously.

"I am praying for daily bread," she replied in a monotone.

Poor Gretchen listened sorrowfully to all that Ernestine had to tell her. She knew that for such a nature as Ernestine's this state of dependence and inactivity was worse than death, and that no love or devotion on her part could reconcile her proud sister to such a lot. She could advise nothing. The only thing that Ernestine could do for her own support was, perhaps, copying. But who in the little town would have anything to copy? And they could hardly live unless Ernestine was able to earn something. Gretchen's modest salary would hardly suffice to keep them from starvation. She did not mind any amount of deprivation for herself,—but could she see Ernestine pine and sicken for want of nourishing food? Then she had promised solemnly

to accept no help from Möllner or Hilsborn. What was to be done?

After a long, sleepless night, she arose at dawn, and, while Ernestine was still sleeping, sat down and wrote to Hilsborn. She wrote hurriedly, and the long letter was wet with tears that Ernestine would have been grieved to see. She finished it before Ernestine awoke, and her eyes began to sparkle again, as if they trusted that this letter would change the whole aspect of affairs.

"Gretchen," said Ernestine, as Gretchen leaned over her to give her a morning kiss, "how gay you look! Do you not feel the heavy burden that I have laid upon your shoulders?"

"Oh, Ernestine," her sister replied, "as long as I have you, I will be thankful for you, however dark matters may appear outside."

Ernestine looked at her thoughtfully. "Gretchen, there is a greatness in your fidelity and self-sacrifice that I never before conceived of. Now first I know what Dr. Möllner meant by true womanliness. This womanliness your father took from me,—you, his child, have restored to me. It is the greatest gift you have given me, and it atones for his depriving me of it."

Gretchen breathed a sigh of relief. "When you say so, I seem to hear the angels tell me that mercy will be shewn to my poor father. Indeed, dear Ernestine, you are in alliance with beings of a better world, or you could not know how to console and inspire me thus. Indeed, when you look at me so tenderly I must believe there is redemption for the soul of my father. What can I do to repay you for such consolation?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE THIRD POWER.

“ ‘WHAT the law of force fails to accomplish, the intellect will effect,—where the intellect fails, love succeeds!’ That was what he said,” said Ernestine. Again her thoughts were involuntarily occupied with Johannes. “Were I allowed to write the sermons for his reverence, instead of copying them, that would serve me as text.” Thus she broke forth one day while seated with Gretchen at the table, where the latter was busy finishing the new dress that Hilsborn had sent her.

“Have you proposed it to the Pastor?” asked Gretchen with a smile.

“If he were not so conceited, I would do so, but as he is, I suppose he would be offended.”

“I rather suppose so, too,” laughed Gretchen.

“There is a Nemesis in this,” said Ernestine, as she mended her pen. “Here am I, who have hardly ever listened to a sermon in my life, obliged to copy sermons for my bread. Well,” she added gravely, “it is just.”

Again her pen flew quicker over the paper. After some time she leaned back, and drew a long breath. “I have learnt self-denial and prayer, but I have yet to learn the hardest task of all—patience.”

“This must be a terrible drudgery to such a mind as yours, transcribing the thoughts of another,” said Gretchen.

“If there only were thoughts here, but there is nothing in these pages but empty words. I am not allowed even to polish the style, or correct blunders—it is mental death!”

She wrote on for a while, then suddenly raised her head and broke out—"At least they might let women have something to do with religion, if they deny our right to meddle with science and politics. Religion is so much a matter of feeling, and feeling is a woman's prerogative. Humility, self-sacrifice, and submission are native to woman, and a woman's lips could discourse far more eloquently than a man's of these Christian qualities. Why should a woman not be found worthy to declare the Word of God?" She suppressed a sigh. "Ah, the old indignation is mastering me again! I will not yield to it; independence of thought does not become a copyist." She tried to go on with her writing, but her cheeks were flushed, and the tears stood in her eyes. "Oh, Gretchen, I shall never live down my pity for our poor sex. It will be always the same with me; the slightest allusion to our wrongs cuts me to the quick."

Gretchen laid her hand upon her shoulder. "Dear Ernestine, we will speak of this some other time. Now remember that you have promised that your copy shall be ready by four o'clock."

"You are right. I will finish it instantly," said Ernestine, dipping the pen in the ink. "No, I cannot let such nonsense stand as this!" she exclaimed, after a pause. "The man is going to have the sermons printed,—he will thank me for correcting the worst faults."

"Ernestine, take care,—he may be offended," said Gretchen.

"Oh, no, surely I may change a couple of words. Whatever goes through my hands shall be as free from error as possible."

Gretchen shook her head.

Ernestine completed her copy in about half an hour, and prepared to carry it to the pastor.

The days were beginning to grow longer. Although it was past four o'clock, the winter sun was looking brightly into the room, and upon the roofs below their windows the snow was melting into little rills.

"Shall you be back soon?" Gretchen called after Ernestine as she went out.

"In a very little while," was the answer, as the speaker left the room with her bundle of papers under her arm.

Gretchen was left alone in the room.

Another half-hour passed. A firm step was heard ascending the stairs. Gretchen listened intently. Her heart beat fast with joyous expectancy. Who was it that was intruding upon their seclusion?

She had not long to wait: there was a loud knock at the door. Gretchen's "Come in" was instantly followed by a "Thank God, 'tis he!" for Möllner stood upon the threshold.

"I knew you would come. I was sure my letter to Herr Hilsborn would bring you. I am delighted!" cried the girl drawing him into the room. He said nothing in reply to her welcome, but let her take his hat and coat, and then, with a glance around the wretched apartment, exclaimed, in a tone of horror-stricken compassion, "Good God!"

Gretchen understood him, and gave him time to recover himself.

At last he added, "Where is she?"

"She has gone to carry home some copying that the pastor gave her to do. She will be here very soon. Do not be startled at seeing her look out of sorts. We have lived wretchedly of late."

Johannes took her hand. "Gretchen, can't you hide me somewhere? I am not sufficiently composed to see her at present. I must collect myself.

"Yes, come into our kitchen. I had better prepare Ernestine, too, for seeing you, for she is weak, and must be treated with caution."

She conducted him into the little, cold, dark room that she called a kitchen.

"Look! the poor girl has cooked our wretched dinners in this place for the last five months, and shed many a tear when she spoiled anything. Oh, if you could have seen, as I have, our proud Ernestine working, struggling, and starving, you would not have refrained so long from putting an end to our misery."

"It is well that I could not see it. I should have been unnerved, and would have spoiled all by precipitation."

"Forgive me, but indeed you are hard. Hilsborn would not have left me here one instant longer than he could have helped."

"And he would have been right, Gretchen. But Ernestine and you are very different characters. This struggle for life was needful to her, and she insisted on experiencing it. Even now I am not sure that she will allow me to put an end to it."

"Oh, yes! when you see Ernestine, you will acknowledge that it is high time to hasten to her assistance. Since all her efforts to obtain a situation have failed, her spirit seems well-nigh broken. A little more of this battle and defeat would hopelessly embitter her spirit, and her health would fail."

Johannes threw himself into the wooden chair by the window, where Ernestine had been visited by such poetic dreams, in the midst of the hard prose of her life. "Here is a letter to you from Hilsborn, my dear Gretchen. He would have been only too glad to come with me, but every moment of his time is engaged."

"He is good and true," said Gretchen, "and I know he trusts me, but I cannot leave Ernestine until her future is assured."

"You are a noble girl, Gretchen! If Ernestine had the least suspicion of what you are surrendering for her sake, she would never permit——" He paused, a flush mounted to his brow, his lips trembled, as he whispered, "There she is! I hear her coming! For God's sake, Gretchen, give me time to collect myself,"

"I will go and meet her, that she may not come in here," said Gretchen.

Johannes handed her a book. "Here, lay this upon her table. It is a copy of the same edition of Andersen's Fairy Tales that I once gave her, and that was burnt. It may prepare her for seeing me."

Gretchen hurried into the next room, and laid the book in Ernestine's work-basket. She started at the haggard

appearance of Ernestine as she entered with eyes flashing, and an expression of sullen indignation upon every feature.

"What is the matter, Ernestine?" she asked.

Ernestine threw off her hat and cloak, wrung her hands, and paced hurriedly to and fro. "That is at an end also!"

"What?—Ernestine!—what?"

"The pastor has refused to give me any more sermons to copy, because I ventured to correct his stupid blunders."

"Oh, is that all?" cried Gretchen, very much relieved.

"Is that all?" Ernestine repeated bitterly. "You say that, because, faithful and true as you are, you see no hardship in the prospect of supporting me again without any help on my part, by your own unwearied exertions. You can say, 'Is that all?' but I, who fancied myself the first and proudest of my sex, am a beggar, dependent upon charity, fit for nothing but the duties of a common maid-servant, and not able to perform even those decently. I have lost all confidence, all hope, in myself. That is all!"

Gretchen caressed her lovingly, and smiled. "Ah, Ernestine, how could you reject Dr. Möllner when he first wooed you? I should have thought you would have given your heart to him upon the spot. I only hope you may never know what you threw away."

"Gretchen," said Ernestine gravely, "it is long since I have learned the value of what I rejected. The pride with which I turned from him, refusing to sacrifice my foolish ambition to make myself a name, has been severely punished. As in our dreams we are sometimes borne aloft upon wings into immeasurable space, until our balance is lost and we fall headlong, awaking with the shock, so my ambition carried me to heights where I could not sustain myself. I fell, but strong and tender arms were held out to receive me, and I awoke to find myself embraced by them instead of prostrate in a frightful abyss. Then, in the confusion of my waking, I thought those sustaining arms were fetters. I thrust them from me, and now I

lie crushed and broken on the ground." She folded her arms upon the table, and bowed her head on them.

Gently Gretchen took the book from the basket, and opening it where she saw that Johannes had put a mark, pushed it silently towards Ernestine, who raised her head at the touch, and at first looked absently at the pages before her, then gazed and gazed as if utterly unable to comprehend what she saw. It was her dear old book,—there was the swan that she had burned. "Good Heavens!" she cried, between laughter and tears, "can this be real? My swan! My swan! Who brought me this? Oh, the dreams of my childhood, who has restored them to me?"

She knelt beside the table, and laid her cheek upon the book. Before her closed eyes again fell dark night. Before her upon the table burned the dim lamp, and her father lay asleep close at hand. She read the story of the Ugly Duckling, and above her softly rustled the snowy plumage of the swan, and among her curls trembled the leaves of the oak whence the handsome boy had snatched her from mortal peril. Then her father awoke, and sent her up to her uncle. There stood the telescope, through which she was again gazing, thirsting for a peace which her young heart imagined without the power of grasping—filled with longing to be borne up—up to those starry worlds gliding so silently through space. She knew now at last what it was that she had so desired,—Love! But she searched for it in vain among those cold, white worlds on high. Suddenly she was standing upon the hill in the garden of her castle, and above her hovered the faithful little mermaid, dissolved into an evening cloud, while a deep, tender voice whispered, "Poor swan!" Here, here was what she sought.

"Poor swan!" The words sounded distinctly in her ears, not in her dreamy fancy only. She opened her eyes, and started up with a low cry, and would have fled,—fled to the uttermost ends of the earth,—but she could not stir from the spot. She tottered and would have fallen, but two strong arms upheld her, and for a moment she lost all consciousness. This was rest indeed.

"Shall I get some water?" asked Gretchen.

"Oh, no ! Do not grudge me one moment," said Johannes, clasping the lifeless form to his heart. "She will recoil from me as soon as she comes to herself."

"You should not have spoken to her so suddenly," said Gretchen.

Ernestine opened her eyes, looked up and around for a moment in bewilderment, and then extricated herself instantly from the arms in which she had found rest.

"Did I not know her well?" Johannes said, in a glance, to Gretchen.

"You came so unexpectedly,—I was weak. I am ashamed of myself," said Ernestine, struggling for composure.

"You would have reason to be ashamed if you could be strong at this moment," he replied. At a sign from him, Gretchen withdrew.

Johannes gazed for a moment with intense devotion into Ernestine's eyes. "Dear heart, let me speak one fervent last word to you. I know that I just now held a different Ernestine in my arms than that cruel, headstrong maiden who fled from me nearly six months ago. I felt it in the throbbing of your heart. But fear nothing, I am not come to take advantage of your helpless condition; I am not going to wring from you a decision which might be stigmatized, in your present circumstances, as extorted from you by necessity. I understand you now. Yours is a nature which will never yield to pressure from without,—it must take form and direction from within. It would be as useless to attempt controlling such a nature by force as to endeavour to make a rose bloom by tearing open the bud. We should destroy, but could not unfold the flower. I have done all that I could to restore your independence to you, which I am well aware is as necessary to you as light and air. You once accused me of selfishness and interested motives. You shall be convinced that you did me injustice in this respect." He drew a paper from his breast-pocket. "Through my friend Brenter, in St. Petersburg, I have succeeded in procuring you the offer of a position as Teacher of Natural Science in the famous Normal School there. The place is a capital one, and has hitherto been occupied by men only.

You will be entire mistress of your time, with the exception of the few hours daily spent in instruction. You can easily pursue your studies, and I can procure you admission to the society of men of science in St. Petersburg. Your life there will be what you have all along desired. You can earn your livelihood honourably, and sooner or later you will have an opportunity of attaining the goal of your desires,—a degree, for the Russian Universities are not so strict as the German in the matter of admitting women to their honours. Here is Brenter's letter. You see it makes you independent of all aid, even of mine. And now I venture again to ask you to make a sacrifice for me,—a great sacrifice. If you now grant my suit you know well that no suspicion can be cast upon the freedom of your choice, or that you can be accused of being driven into my arms by necessity. If you yield now, you renounce brilliant prospects for my sake. I urge nothing in my own behalf. Leave me, and there is a great future before you. Be mine, and my heart and home stand open to receive you. I will only say, 'Choose, Ernestine.'

"And have you done this,—this for me?" said Ernestine, trembling with emotion. "How truly have you understood and respected my pride! How firm and yet how tender you have been with me! How can I thank you, how can I repay you?"

"How, Ernestine? Let your own heart answer."

"I cannot listen to my heart alone. I must do whatever will make me worthiest of such devoted love. What shall I,—what ought I to decide?"

"Let me tell you, for the last time, if you do not know, that true pride will teach you that you can give me nothing half so precious as your own self. The value of this gift no worldly wealth or honours could enhance. True humility will teach you to yield your fate unquestioningly to the man who gives his life to you. Go from me, and you may be great, but you cannot be womanly, and what is such greatness, attained at the cost of a heart? Give up the false pride that would seek fame beyond the bounds of a woman's sphere, and confess that there is nothing greater than you

can do than to enrich and bless the man who loves you. God intended you to be, not a man, but a true, loving woman." He broke off. "However, I repeat, the choice lies in your hands."

"The choice! Is there any choice left me?" cried Ernestine, with sparkling eyes. "Shall I dissemble now, and try to conceal what I have long been ill able to control? What are learning and fame, what the pride of position that you have offered me, compared with the happiness of this moment? Away with them all, and away also with my false pride! My choice is made, Johannes." And she sank upon his breast.

He clasped her as in a dream. Their lips met in a first long kiss, in which the lover breathed forth his long-pent-up tenderness.

She trembled like a scarce-opened flower in the first wind of summer, and yet all was as well with her as when she had, as a child, measured herself against the Titanic force of the elements in commotion around her. She knew now that love was no weakness, but a mighty power, and that the power was divine. She raised her head at last, and looked at him with tears in her eyes. "Johannes,—dearest, best,—forgive—forgive my faults and failings—I have repented them long ago!"

He leaned over her, and whispered, "Ernestine, only love, do you now confess the third power of which I once told you?"

"Yes, indeed, I confess and bow before it." She folded her hands, and her face seemed for a moment transfigured. "Oh, Spirit of Love, dwell in my heart, and teach me to be worthy of him who is so dear to me."

* * * * *

There was a double wedding such as the town of N—— had never seen before! Möllner and Ernestine, Hilsborn and Gretchen, were married on the same day. There was a great crowd before the quiet house where Professor Möllner

lived, to witness the arrival of the numerous guests who were to escort the bridal parties to church.

"That is one of the bridesmaids, but she is an old one," was whispered among the people as Elsa and her brother alighted from their carriage.

"And that is another, but a very young one," was added, as a stalwart young man lifted a charming brown-eyed child out of the carriage. She was dressed in white with pink ribbons, and had a huge bouquet in her hand.

"But, oh, she has only one arm!" was uttered in a tone of compassion as she passed into the house, accompanied by her companion bridesmaid, and disappeared beneath the garlands and among the flowering shrubs with which the hall was decorated.

Within, the large drawing-room was crowded with the science and respectability of N——. There had been great astonishment among the inhabitants of the place when the engagement of Johannes to Ernestine von Hartwich was announced, but all agreed that Professor Möllner knew what he was about; and those who were invited to the wedding declared themselves delighted with the match.

Even Elsa was appeased by Möllner's request that she would act as bridesmaid. "I am glad to be his bridesmaid," she said to her sister-in-law in the morning. "It will break my heart, but I will not repine! I shall fade away like a blossom that zephyrs waft from the tree before it can become fruit. Oh, no, I do not repine,—I only share the fate of thousands of my sisters. The blossom dying the death of innocence in its virgin purity is not to be pitied—no, let pity be for him who could crush it beneath his tread in his onward path, without ever dreaming of the delight that it might have given him." She did not foresee that the poetic death that she anticipated would be very long delayed, and that she would be a welcome guest in Möllner's house in future years, as "Aunt Elsa" to a throng of attentive little listeners whom she would delight with many a tale about the elves, gnomes, and wild-flowers of her youth. She was dressed in character on the present occasion, in sea-green, with a wreath of cherry-blossoms in her hair; a

long narrow scarf of white satin fluttered about her slender figure. "Many might be more richly clad," she thought, "but none so romantically and poetically."

Her brother was in a sad state of mind as he this morning put on the dress-coat in which he had made his first appearance a year before in the Countess Worronska's boudoir. He had just heard that the beautiful countess had been killed in a race at St. Petersburg, and his grief at the death of the woman whom he still loved was increased by the necessity of concealing it.

In spite of the number of guests, a solemn silence reigned in the large apartment, for all were awaiting the entrance of the brides.

Who has been unconscious of a slight thrill at the first appearance of a bride, a young girl, about to take the most important step of her life? All eyes were turned towards the door of the antechamber.

Johannes, with his mother, and Hilsborn, with Heim, placed themselves opposite it, the guests withdrew from around them, and a space through the centre of the room was left free.

Slowly, and enveloped in her floating veil as in a white cloud, her head bowed beneath the myrtle-wreath, Ernestine entered the room. Her dark eyelashes were drooping, and upon her broad brow true womanhood sat enthroned. She paused, bewildered and confused by the presence of so many people, among whom the whisper ran, "How lovely the bride looks!" In defiance of all rule, Johannes hastened to her, and clasped her hands in his.

"My swan," he whispered, "now you have unfolded your plumage!"

Ernestine bent her head lower still, and a tear fell upon his hand.

"Johannes," she said softly, "let me confess,—I have loved you ever since you made known to me, eleven years ago, the promise of the swan, but I little dreamed that it was only through you that the promise could be fulfilled!"

"You loved me, and yet rejected and tormented me! Oh, Ernestine, what penalty is there for such cruelty?"

"Only one, dearest, but a severe one,—repentance for wasted time."

"Amen, my daughter," said the mother of Johannes gravely.

The second bride, Gretchen, now entered, with blushing cheeks and a radiant smile. Hilsborn, with his foster-father, went to her, and Heim gave her his paternal benediction. Then came Angelica and the faithful Willmers, who had discharged the office of ladies'-maid to the pair.

From a corner of the room Johannes led forward a bowed, aged form, the friend whom Ernestine had chosen to give her away,—old Leonhardt.

"Father," she said, gently taking his hand in one of hers, while she held out the other to Madame Möllner,—"father, mother, in spirit and in truth, I thank you both."

"Ernestine," said Leonhardt, "only one day in my life,—the day of my own marriage,—can count with this in happiness. God bless you!" The old man was happy indeed, for the day before Walter had handed him a parchment roll with the announcement—"It is my diploma."

"Are we never going to start?" suddenly exclaimed Maurice. "These lovers are not in any hurry, apparently. They have had sufficient time to make up their minds,—pray heaven they have not begun at the last moment to regret their decision. To church, then, in God's name."

"In God's name," Ernestine whispered, and the words were spoken with her whole soul.

CHAPTER VIII.

A YEAR LATER.

"WHO would have thought that Ernestine would ever have turned out such a woman?" said Maurice Kern, in a suppressed tone to his wife.

The pair were walking to and fro in Möllner's study, which was furnished precisely like Ernestine's former library, and they were evidently awaiting some event with anxiety.

Half-hidden by the heavy folds of the blue curtains, Hilsborn and Gretchen were standing at the window. They did not speak, their hearts were too full. Gretchen's hands were folded, as though she were breathing a silent prayer, and Hilsborn stood grave and anxious beside her. Even Maurice stopped now and then and looked towards the door of the adjoining room, as if expecting it to open; but he evidently wished to conceal his emotion, and talked on gaily. "Why, who would have thought it? Johannes must have been puzzled indeed to know how to train that scatterbrain."

"I always told you," said Angelica, "that Johannes could do whatever he chose, and Ernestine was always sweet and good at core, but was warped by her education. I liked her from the first moment that I saw her after she was grown up, and you know I always defended her from your attacks. Now all has turned out as I said it would."

"Oh, of course!" laughed Maurice, "I should like to hear of something you women did not know all about beforehand. You are always so much sharper than we men. If Ernestine had made her husband as unhappy as she makes him happy, we should hear the same thing,—'Oh, I told you

so, I saw how it would be from the first, I never liked her.' I know you well!"

"Are you not ashamed," pouted Angelica, "to go on with your silly jokes when we are all so anxious? If Johannes were to lose his wife, what would become of him?"

"Ah, bah!" said Maurice, "he is not going to lose her. Don't be foolish."

Hilsborn came towards them. "Don't make yourself out worse than you are, Maurice," said he. "I never saw you look more uneasy than you do just now. You know well enough what Ernestine is to us all."

"Deuce take it, of course I know it!" cried Maurice,— "she's as much to me as to any of you,—but I hate to hear people cry before they are hurt. God keep her, she's a jewel of a woman!"

"Yes," said Gretchen, joining in the conversation, "such women are rare indeed. How she fulfils every duty, even those that she once considered uninteresting and commonplace!"

"Yes," chimed in Angelica, "my mother is never weary of sounding her praises."

"This is the most wonderful thing she has accomplished yet," said Maurice. "Only listen to these two notable housewives, Hilsborn, joining in a chorus of praise of a third! Did you ever hear anything like it? I never did."

"She deserves it all," answered Hilsborn. "And then she is invaluable to Johannes as a scientific companion and assistant. He could as ill spare her at his desk or in his laboratory as at the head of his household—or—"

"Hush!" interrupted Angelica, "did you not hear someone at the door?" And silence reigned in the room again for awhile.

"I hope it will be a boy,—Ernestine longs for a boy," sighed Angelica.

"Past two o'clock," said Hilsborn. "I wish they would send us someone to say how she is."

Suddenly the door was flung open, and old Heim's deep voice cried, "It is over."

"Thank God!" they all exclaimed as with one breath.

"Is it a boy?" asked Angelica.

"No; a girl."

"A girl!" said Maurice. "Well, 'tis not pretty, but sin is uglier," as the Suabian said."

"Do be quiet! What would Ernestine say if she heard you, you mocker?" said Angelica. "May we not go to her, Uncle Heim?"

"No; stay where you are," said the old man, closing the door.

Within Ernestine's apartment all was hush and repose. Johannes was standing by Ernestine's side, mute with happiness, supporting her head, when he was called to look at his little daughter, a bundle of snowy wrappings, in her grandmother's arms.

He took the little creature from her, and laid it by his wife's side. "Mother," was all he said, leaning over her, and gazing into the pure delight mirrored in her eyes. At last he raised his head, and said, laughingly, "But, Ernestine, 'it is only a girl!'"

"Be it so. I do not question what God has sent me. I am a mother. I envy no man now, and our daughter shall never do so. We will cherish and train our child to be what a true woman should be, and some day she will be able to say to one whom she loves, as I do to you, my dearest, 'Thank God that I am a woman, and that I am yours.'"

"Ernestine," said Johannes, "those are the dearest words you could utter. Happy the daughter of such a mother! Father Heim, mother dear, did you hear Ernestine's confession! She is reconciled at last to the destiny of her sex."

THE END.



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